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BOSTON AND NEW YORK

The Wares of Edgefield

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BY

Eliza Orne White



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY

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To

G. De V. C.

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The Wares of Edgefield

The Wares of Edgefield

CHAPTER I

DR. WARE

DR. WARE'S sign had been out for so short a time in Edgefield that he could usually count upon his office-hours as a quiet period for reading or writing. He had been an omnivorous reader from the time when, as a little boy, he used to steal into his father's study and take out the volumes on the lower shelves. His father was an Orthodox minister, and a stern, unapproachable man, whom all the world feared; but his small son Edmund had never been afraid of any one, and he always met a first rebuff in such a genial way that he seldom received a second. The flaxen-haired child ventured in where no one else had dared to intrude, and boldly took possession of a heart that had never before been completely understood. His father's death had been the tragedy of Edmund's boyhood, a tragedy mitigated by his temperament, for he was capable of feeling so intensely that, in self-defense, he always cast about for some antidote to the pain, and after his father went, he attached himself to his mother with redoubled ardor. His

older sisters were too far removed from him in age and character to count for much in his life; but soon after his father's death, his cousin Nancy came to live next door, and new impressions, if they did not efface old ones, at least dulled them.

This afternoon Dr. Ware's solitude was doubly secure, for a heavy snowstorm was banking up the windows. He glanced at the wood-fire on his hearth, and then at the room, simple almost to bareness, but with a charm and refinement in every detail.

"Alice will like it," he thought.

It seemed incredible that a woman whom he had first seen only five months before should so dominate his life that every other affection paled before his love for her. The words in her last letter, which he had read over many times, seemed to him touchingly noble in their self-revelation. He had considered her a creature set apart by her unusual gifts of person and of mind, and then this statue of snow had melted and revealed fire at the heart. Life had suddenly broadened a hundred-fold, and taken on an inner significance, a deep seriousness, that it had heretofore lacked.

Edmund was still writing — he had been writing page after page, with no thought of his immediate present — when his office door opened tentatively, and his sad-faced housekeeper stood on the threshold.

"Supper is ready, Mr. Edmund," she said, with

the melancholy cadence of one who is the messenger of ill news.

"Supper! I had no idea it was so late."

He hurriedly added a few lines, and then addressed an envelope, and thrust his letter into it.

Dr. Ware ate his cold beef and warmed-up potatoes with a preoccupied air, while Mrs. Hart waited on him with the sombre aspect of a bird of ill-omen. He wondered vaguely whether she had been happy in the early days of her marriage. Ever since he had known her she had worn the look of a martyr, and he had thought that the death of her husband might lighten her depression; but it had only increased it.

"You have n't forgotten the wedding to-night, have you?" Mrs. Hart asked, in the same indifferent tone.

"The wedding?" His mind seemed to come back from a far journey. "Oh, it is to-night, is n't it? I had forgotten."

The recollection of Kate Marchant's wedding blurred the impression of an ideal world as effectually as if a brush full of badly assorted oil paints had suddenly smeared a delicate pastel drawing. The very idea of Kate, with her aggressive beauty, her shrill voice, and her jarring personality, seemed an offense in his present frame of mind. He wished her well, but he would be glad never to see or hear of her again.

"It is too bad a storm to go out in," Mrs. Hart

ventured, "but I thought maybe you would n't like it if I did n't remind you."

"I have got to go, worse luck!"

He grumbled to himself all the time he was getting ready for Kate's wedding; not that he minded the four-mile drive in the teeth of the storm: this prospect in itself would have appealed to one side of his character, if there had been any one he wanted to see at the other end of the journey; but he disliked being brought face to face with Kate, who, not so very many years ago, had charmed him to an extent that he did not care to remember. How he ever could have fancied himself in love with her, even for a brief period, he could not understand now, for the thought of her was like an unpleasant dream.

At the post-office he found a letter from Alice, and also one from his cousin Nancy, which he did not open. Alice said she had been obliged to confide their engagement to Nancy, and so he might feel free to tell his mother. He saw by the clock in the post-office that he could stop for a few minutes at his mother's house, for he had allowed more time than was necessary, not realizing that the roads were so well broken out.

As he drove on, confident of her tender sympathy that had never failed him, he was hardly conscious of the snow in his face, or the sharp sting of the north wind and the numbness of his hands. He had again entered a world made over new for him and Alice.

It was with a start that he heard his name called as he passed a cross-road; and looking up, he saw a man with slouching gait, and with a soft felt hat drawn down over his eyes as a protection against the storm.

Dr. Ware did not recognize him at first. "Well, what do you want?" he asked sharply.

"I was just goin' for you," the man said. "My mother's took sick again."

"Oh, you are Gus Leggett," the doctor returned in anything but a cordial tone, as he recognized one of the village ne'er-do-weels. Mrs. Leggett was a confirmed hypochondriac, and this unnecessary delay chafed him. "I am in a great hurry. I am just going to a wedding," he said.

"Whose weddin'? Yourn?" Gus asked, with drawling insolence. "Do you think weddin's are of more account than sick folks?"

"Is your mother really sick?"

"By golly! I guess I would n't be comin' out in this storm if she wa'n't!"

Dr. Ware reflected, as he made room for Gus in the sleigh, that the man of business may refuse an unprofitable job, and the lawyer an unsavory case, but that the doctor is always at the beck and call of his most inconsiderate patients.

As they went sharply down the steep hill that led to Edgefield hollow, the country took on a strange beauty. The apple trees on either side of the way were frosted with white, and the uneven stone

walls and rugged boulders were softened and idealized by the poetic touch of the snow. The world in its white beauty seemed as far removed from the world of a few months ago as did his present life from his past.

As they came nearer the cottage, a light gleamed out dimly from the dirt-begrimed windows, as if it were shining through smoked glass. The hovel, like its owners, had once seen better days, and then had gone from bad to worse. The house was situated in the bottom of an unhealthy hollow, near a marshy pond, but no board of health and no doctor could detach its occupants from the one place they could call home. The roof had begun to fall in, and there were no windows which had their full complement of panes. The gaps were stuffed with dirty rags, and the walls inside the house were covered with the grime of many years. Dr. Ware went into Mrs. Leggett's bedroom. She lay propped up in a rare old carved mahogany four-posted bedstead, which looked oddly out of place in its squalid surrounding.

Mrs. Leggett's face was like yellow parchment, seamed and gullied with many cracks. She had on a woolen nightcap, and a greasy shawl was pinned around her neck. At the doctor's approach she began to cough in a hollow way that struck his practiced ear as somewhat forced.

"Oh, doctor, such a pain, such distress as I have had!" she began.

Now that Edmund was face to face with his un-

promising patient, he forgot his vexation, and did what he could to make her more comfortable. The conditions, however, were such as to put him in anything but a tolerant frame of mind towards her son.

As Dr. Ware sat there talking with Mrs. Leggett, Gus came in from the kitchen with a cup of lumpy porridge, which he handed awkwardly to his mother. The grimy state of the cup put the finishing touch to the doctor's self-restraint.

"Your mother would be much more comfortable at the poor farm, where she could have proper care," he remarked.

"How 'd you like to have your mother spend the winter at the poor farm?" Gus flashed out, with an oath.

"I'd much rather take her there than keep her in a place like this, that is n't fit to live in. If you will stay here, you ought to clean things up," he added, turning to Gus. "A strong young fellow like you ought to make things comfortable for his mother instead of tipping all day at the Edgefield House."

Once having started on this theme, Edmund Ware did not stop until he had given Gus a very large portion of his mind.

As the doctor closed the front door, after his call was over, Gus said to his mother, "I'd like to kick that tow-headed cuss, with his damned airs. I guess I be just as good as him. He's only a North Edgefield boy himself. He got his eddication to start out with at number four primary, same as I

did, only he got it eight or ten years ahead of me, so he has had time to rise. He used to go foolin' round with that red-headed Marchant gal, if he is so tony now."

Meanwhile, his back once turned to the Leggetts, the doctor did not give them another thought until he came to the driveway that led to his mother's house, when he reflected, with irritation, that the call had lost him those precious ten minutes with her. He took out his watch and read the time by the light of a dimly shining street-lamp. He saw with relief that he was too late for the ceremony; he could therefore be a little later, and stop to tell his happy news to his mother. He was sure that she would not go to the wedding, for she was always housed during the severest winter weather, a circumstance which she laughingly attributed to the fact that her mother was a Virginian.

For a wonder Mrs. Ware was alone. Her daughters were so energetic in their well-doing that they seldom allowed her this privilege; one or the other usually mounted guard over her with a devotion that she could sometimes have spared. She was sitting before the fire, holding the tortoise-shell cat, a visitor that Marcia always banished from the parlor. Mrs. Ware had begun the evening by taking up a volume of German poetry that she knew the girls would not approve of her reading by lamplight; but her eyes had traitorously taken

sides with her daughters, and so she had been going back over the past from the elevation of her sixty years. There had been more than one great sorrow in her life, but to-night it was the thought of her many mistakes that oppressed her. She felt that the prayer of all philosophers and great teachers for wisdom was the one prayer worth uttering, and that if she could only live her life over again, she could make it a fruitful thing.

The door opened at this point, and Edmund, snow-covered, but radiant, thrust in his head.

“Edmund! My dearest boy!” she cried with delight.

“Don’t come out here, mother, until I get off a little of this snow. Ah, you are alone. I hoped you would be. I suppose the girls are at the wedding?”

“Yes. Why are n’t you there?”

Edmund explained briefly, and afterwards, as he sat by his mother’s side, holding her hand, he wondered in what words he could tell her his great news. She sat looking down at him with her eyes full of a glad content. He had always thought them the most beautiful eyes he knew. They were gray, changing to blue, or green, and when he saw them he often thought of the sea, for they had the same suggestion of strange, unfathomable things. He felt that if one could read them truly, one could read all the secrets of life, with its disappointments, griefs, and pain, but its inalienable, underlying note of hope. They were young eyes in spite of

their sixty years, far younger, he thought, than the eyes of his sisters, who had lived in the world and had apparently known as little of what was going on beneath the surface as if they had been blind from birth.

“Mother dear,” he began, “I have come to-night to tell you something about myself. I wanted you to know first of all.”

There came to Mrs. Ware a sharp presentiment. In the moment that elapsed before he went on, she felt as if she had known always that this was coming, and had blindly, selfishly, been trying to prevent it.

“Oh, it is very hard to tell you,” Edmund said. “Can’t you guess? It is the one best thing, the one thing I have wanted and never had.”

Yes, she knew. It was the one thing that she could never give him, the one thing that was to separate him from her.

“I think I can guess, dear,” she answered steadily. “You have found some one you care for and who cares for you.”

“Yes. Is n’t it wonderful?” Again he looked into her eyes, and their expression baffled him. He had thought she would have been overrunning with exclamations of joy. Then he remembered that he had not told her who it was. “It is Nancy’s step-sister, Alice Sumner,” he said. “You’ve seen her. You know how beautiful she is, wonderfully beautiful: beautiful in feature and form, but most

of all, beautiful in character. And she loves me." He spoke the last words almost under his breath. "Is n't it wonderful! Mother, it seems as if one of your old fairy-tales were coming true."

He wondered why his mother sat so silent, and why her grasp loosened on his hand.

"I hope you will be very, very happy," she said at last.

In the intimate talk which followed, Edmund did not find the full measure of sympathy that had always been his. He stifled his vague feeling of disappointment by saying to himself, "She'll adore Alice when she knows her," and his thoughts soon left his mother far behind, as he drove on in the storm towards Kate Marchant's house.

Kate had always said that her wedding was to be a gay one, but when she first made this remark, she had not intended to have Andrew Howland for a bridegroom. Kate's course had been a devious one, and her heart would have been cracked and broken many times, if it had not been of such indestructible material that what would have shattered a less serviceable organ, had not given hers even a nick.

Edmund wondered, as he entered the long, low room where the wedding guests were assembled, by what freak of destiny Andrew Howland had fallen in love with Kate Marchant; for Andrew, with his mild blue eyes, his unprac-

tical ways, his unworldly ideals, and his blameless life, was on the whole the best fellow he had ever known, and Kate, although she had never crossed the line of respectability, was one of the least satisfactory of women. And yet there they stood together, at the end of the room, and they were to be together for life. Andrew, with his slightly stooping figure and his dreamy expression, seemed to have entered a kingdom of happiness. Kate stood by him in her white satin gown and long tulle veil, with its wreath of orange-blossoms. She looked gay but not happy, and as if she were playing the part of bride and playing it well. She had never been handsomer; her white dress and shimmering veil softened the effect of her elaborately arranged red hair, which was almost too striking a contrast to her pink-and-white complexion. Her china-blue eyes ranged the room restlessly, and fixed themselves from time to time on the door.

As Edmund paused on the threshold, an old schoolmate of his, Gideon Patrick Baker, for whom he cherished an especial aversion, came forward blandly to meet him. Edmund had a momentary feeling of vexation when he saw him, which was quickly succeeded by a smile at his own expense, for who had a better right to be present than Dr. Baker, who was the bride's uncle, although her contemporary in age?

"Doesn't Kate look handsome?" Gideon

asked suavely. "And is n't my sister Sarah well preserved? Who would think she was twenty years older than I am? You know father is going to live in Concord with her and Abraham now?"

Edmund glanced indifferently at the portly figure of Mrs. Abraham Kelly, whose charms at no time had seemed to him worth preserving, and passed on to greet the bride and bridegroom; but his progress was stopped by Kate's grandfather, old Gideon Baker. He was several inches taller than his son, and in spite of the fact that his clothes were ill-fitting, while the younger Gideon's were a triumph of the tailor's art, there was a look of rugged power about the father that was lacking in the son. The sharp, black eyes of the older Gideon were not always pleasant to encounter, and as they rested on Edmund, he was suddenly made aware of his remissness in not having called on Mr. Baker. He used to see him often in the days when the old man was landlord of the Edgefield House, and he went there with Kate's brother Jim; but the years that Edmund had spent away from Edgefield, at Dartmouth College, and in studying his profession in Virginia and abroad, had half effaced the memory of those days.

"Good-evening, Ed, you are quite a stranger," said the old man. "I expect the folks in foreign parts have put you out of conceit with your Edgefield friends."

"No, indeed, I have been meaning to come to see you."

"I presume you've been kept very busy with patients," Mr. Baker remarked maliciously.

Kate's expression changed as she caught sight of Edmund, but it was with apparent surprise that she greeted him.

"Why, Ed, I did n't see you come in. I thought the storm had kept you."

"No, a patient kept me, but I am glad to be in time to wish you and Andrew a great deal of happiness."

He was turning away, when Kate's grandfather said in his loud voice, "Are n't you going to kiss the bride?"

And Kate added in a tone so low that only Edmund could hear, "You need n't be so bashful; it is n't the first time."

Edmund stood still for a moment. He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to pass on, but he did not feel that he could put her to discomfort before this group of his and her old playfellows, who were all watching them with interest; so he turned and kissed her, and the angry color flamed into her cheeks; for it was the cool, indifferent kiss of the man who has been disillusioned, and nothing else could have so served to show her in how little respect he held her.

A certain compunction, joined to the exhilaration that all festivities brought him, made Ed-

mund throw himself into the occasion, and he became the life of the company.

In the room where the presents were on exhibition, he came across his sisters, dressed almost alike, in dove-colored satin with white lace collars. In spite of a fundamental difference in character, their faces were of so nearly the same type that it would have been easy for a stranger to mistake one for the other, except that Marcia was half a head taller than Sophia. They both had smoothly arranged sandy hair, and wholesome faces, and the same quiet dignity.

They turned at his approach. "We are trying to remember the presents to tell mother," said Marcia. "Two dozen teaspoons, one dozen pearl-handled knives, five berry spoons, three pickle forks. Edmund, see how well our butter-dish looks among the other things. I am so glad we did n't give salt cellars, for they have four sets."

Sophia, meanwhile, was taking an inventory of the glass, pictures, and bric-à-brac.

Edmund gave a discursive glance around the room, and his eyes fell on a motto worked in the fashion of the time, in worsted on perforated card-board, "God bless our Home." The irony of it struck him in connection with Kate. He pitied her unworldly husband, he even pitied Kate herself, with her crude love of creature comforts. How could she accept the life of poverty and monotony that would be her portion

with her farmer husband? And most of all, as his mind took a hasty glance through the coming years, he pitied her children. What strange hybrids would they be, these future sons and daughters of a patient, dreamy father with the highest ideals, but wholly lacking in ambition, and a mother with a consuming love of power! Laughter and gay voices came up the stairs, and Edmund went down to join the revelers. It was owing to him that Kate had more rice and old shoes thrown after her than any bride in Edgefield.

At last, Kate and Andrew started off in a covered sleigh, and Edmund went back to his mother's house, where he had decided to spend the night. It was not until he had parted from his sisters and reached his own room, that he read Nancy's letter. He had felt it lying in his pocket, almost as if it had been a live thing, so sure was he of her enthusiasm over the engagement; for what could be so delightful for Nancy as to have her cousin Edmund, who was like a brother to her, marry her beautiful step-sister Alice, whom she admired with a whole-hearted loyalty?

He broke the seal and was disappointed to find that the letter was very brief. Nancy usually wrote long letters, and the words, as he read them, seemed strangely formal. True, Nancy wrote that she was very glad, but he

wanted more; he had supposed that his enthusiastic cousin would be almost as happy as he was himself, and that she would feel, as he did, that there had never been such a wonderful engagement since the world began; but perhaps, after all, he thought with a little smile, the only one who could be expected to fully sympathize with him in this matter was Alice.

CHAPTER II

NANCY

NANCY CALDWELL had cherished an admiration for her step-sister, Alice Sumner, from the moment she first saw the handsome, self-possessed girl, a few years older than herself; for plain, lovable, impulsive little Nancy was capable of worshiping one who had the qualities she did not possess; but ever since she had first entered Alice's life, up to the present time, Nancy had been conscious of being held at arm's length. When Alice's father died, Nancy hoped their common grief would draw them nearer together; but Alice remained unapproachable in her sorrow, while Nancy sobbed her warm little heart out; and now it seemed that they could not even share a common happiness, for when Nancy spoke of her joy in the engagement, Alice looked as if her love were too sacred a thing to be discussed.

A few days after Nancy sent Edmund her letter, the news of the engagement crept out, and one afternoon Alice went to her step-sister's room with a letter in her hand. Nancy was sitting on the bed with her arm around a girl cousin.

She had paused in the act of doing over her hair, with the brush in her hand, to dilate upon the charms of Edmund. Her straight, light brown locks were hanging down her back, and her dressing-sack which was open at the throat revealed uncompromisingly the prominent bones in her thin neck; and yet no one heeded the fact that Nancy was plain, and when, at parties, she wore low-necked gowns, she had more attention than most girls, for Nancy had the gift of quick sympathy, humor, and a responsiveness to "all sorts and conditions of men," and women too, that never wavered.

The door was ajar, and Alice must have heard the cousin say, "She is the last girl in all Boston that I should think would bury herself in a small country-town."

"But you don't know Edmund," Nancy protested. "I've known him ever since I was five. He's been like a big brother to me, and he is the most perfectly splendid person who ever lived."

Then she looked up and saw Alice. Suddenly Nancy felt the cheapness of words, and the impossibility of gauging the depth of strong love. Alice stood there like some heroine of a Greek drama, silent, and wrapped about with an impenetrable mystery. There was something in the nobility of her expression that struck Nancy even more than her beauty. As she glanced furtively at Alice's pale face, framed in the black

hair, and looked for one moment into her dark blue eyes, she felt herself to be a child in spite of her twenty years.

“I was going to consult you, Nancy, about a letter I have had,” Alice said in her low, rich voice.

The girl cousin murmured something concerning a forgotten engagement. Alice protested politely against her leaving, but she went downstairs at once.

“Edmund is coming to Boston for a few days this week,” said Alice.

“Oh, how perfectly delightful!” Nancy cried.

Alice was silent, and Nancy knew that she thought her too gushing. But how could she always remember to curb her tongue, when Edmund was so dear a cousin? Then, as the conversation went on, it gradually dawned on her that Alice was gently and most tactfully trying to suggest that when Edmund came she should efface herself and help them to secure time free from trivial interruptions.

Nancy cried herself to sleep that night. It had not been altogether easy, this giving Alice the first place in Edmund’s heart; but she had pushed back her selfish feelings, and had gone to her step-sister with both hands outstretched; and now she felt that Alice had no room for her, but had thrust her out and barred the door. When Nancy waked and heard the clocks strike

as the slow hours passed, she made a sudden resolution: the days that Edmund was in Boston she would spend in Edgefield with his mother.

In the morning, when she told her plan, Nancy's mother understood.

As her train approached Edgefield, Nancy thought of the many times when she had found Edmund waiting at the station for her. How impatient she used to feel as the train drew near its destination. How rapturous had been the meeting! But now, as Nancy looked with her near-sighted eyes at the wintry landscape buried in snow, Edgefield seemed a bleak place containing little comfort.

The train slowed up, and Nancy saw a man of medium height and light hair standing on the platform. She could have fancied it was Edmund if she had not known he was to take the morning train to Boston. He looked so like Edmund that she finally made a dive for her eye-glasses. It was before the days of rimless ones, and these were framed in dark tortoise-shell and gave Nancy so severe a look, that she preferred to go through life with dim vision, to perching them as a permanent thing on the bridge of her small nose. The man on the platform caught sight of her and waved his hand. It was Edmund! Nancy almost ran out of the train, and was speedily caught in the same warm brotherly embrace as of old.

"Oh, what a dear you are, and how glad I am!" she cried, with breathless incoherence.

Edmund seized her handbag and took her check. "Of course you would rather walk to the house," he said.

"Of course. How does it happen you are not in Boston?" she asked.

"I meant to get off this morning, but I was kept by a patient. I have so few of them, I can't let one slip through my fingers. I am going this afternoon, and when your telegram came it helped reconcile me to the delay. Let's go the longest way, through the woods," he suggested; "we have lots of time."

They turned into an old lumber-road that was kept open for sledding, and Nancy was so happy to be in the country once more that she ran on ahead of her cousin, beneath the snow-laden pines, like some fleet-footed creature of the woods. But she could not afford to waste many of these precious moments, so she hastened back to him.

"Some time I am going to live in Edgefield all the year round," she said. It suddenly came over her that there was no reason now why this dream should not come true, for it was Alice's love of town that had kept Nancy and her mother in Boston.

"It's so good to see you, Nancy darling!" he said, as she rejoined him. "Do you know your note sounded a bit cold? It was as if I'd had a

shower-bath. Somehow I felt as if you would be the most glad of all, next to mother."

"I wrote a letter ten pages long and tore it up," Nancy confided to him with a half-shy upward glance.

"Why did you do that?"

"Because it was too gushing, and because —"

"Out with it, Nancy."

"Because I did not think you would care for a long letter from me, when you have them from Alice."

Edmund put his arm around her waist and drew her to him in his big-brother way.

"And you thought because I care for Alice I was going back on my dear little sister? How little you know me, Nancy! It makes me love every one a hundred times better. It sometimes seems as if I had just got to hug Mrs. Hart, I'm so happy."

"That is not the way it affects Alice," Nancy thought.

They were going up the driveway now, and Nancy felt wrapped about by something warm and infinitely precious. If it were true that Edmund's feeling for her would never change, nothing else in life seemed to matter.

Nancy was devoted to her aunt, and she loved her cousins, Marcia and Sophia, with warm affection. It did not trouble her that these cousins and she had few points of contact. She admired

their practical ability, which was greater than her own, and she loved them for their goodness.

Her aunt gave her a hearty embrace. The tie between them was peculiarly strong. Nancy was the daughter of Mrs. Ware's younger half-brother, Philip Caldwell, who fought on the Southern side in the war of the Rebellion, and fell at the battle of Antietam. Mrs. Ware had never become reconciled to her sister-in-law's second marriage to Mr. Sumner, which had taken her beloved niece away from Edgefield.

Marcia, who had inherited her manners from the other side of the house, came forward and said, as if she had seen her cousin the day before, "How do you do, Nancy?"

Nancy knew that this was merely Marcia's way, and so it only amused her.

Presently Marcia added somewhat coolly, "I am very glad to see you," which was a great admission from Marcia.

"Sophia was so sorry to lose a minute of your visit," said Mrs. Ware, "but she had to go to the dressmaker."

As Nancy stood before the friendly fire, everything seemed so unchanged in the pleasant room that she felt warmed to her heart's core.

Marcia went upstairs with her and Nancy said, impulsively, "Isn't it perfectly splendid about the engagement?"

“Yes. I think it is always better for a doctor to marry young, he gets so much more practice. And I am glad Alice has money of her own.”

After Edmund had gone, Nancy could hardly wait for the evening, which was to bring her a confidential talk with her aunt, for she had begged her cousins to make use of her while she was with them and to go out together freely. It appeared that they had both been anxious to be present at the church sociable, and each had unselfishly tried to hide her desire and make the other go. Now they could both be there, but was Nancy sure she did not wish to go herself?

Nancy liked church sociables, as she liked everything in life of a sociable nature, but tonight there was nothing she wanted so much as a quiet talk with her aunt, and when the door closed behind her cousins with a decorous, gentle sound, Nancy gave a little sigh of pleasure.

“A whole long evening alone with you, Aunt Margaret, seems almost too good to be true,” she said, as she slipped to the hearth-rug at her aunt’s feet.

She meant to begin at once upon Edmund and his engagement, but something held her back, and she talked instead about how dear Marcia and Sophia were, of the weather, of the church sociable, of anything and everything except

Edmund. As the precious minutes slipped away, she felt as a man might who sees his fortune gradually vanishing, yet is unable to put out his hand to save it. Would not her aunt open the subject herself? She longed to know how she felt about the engagement.

At last Mrs. Ware began. "Don't you think Edmund seems very happy?"

"Oh, so happy!"

"I am so glad," said Edmund's mother.

"And so am I," agreed his cousin. "It is the most wonderful engagement I ever knew, and I have never been so glad of anything."

"Neither have I."

There followed a long silence. This was not the talk that Nancy had planned.

After a time Mrs. Ware got up and went to a closet where there was a locked drawer.

"Nancy," she said, "there is a little room that we each of us keep locked, even from our nearest and dearest. Bluebeard is not the only one who doesn't want all his rooms opened. You know what a good housekeeper Marcia is, — I don't know how I could live without her, — but in house-cleaning time I never give her the key of my little room. There is a drawer in my closet that is full of foolish things. I know Marcia would cast out half the contents, but my past is sacred to me, and the things of least value are those I value most."

"Yes, I know," said Nancy; for she, too, had her little room.

"I am getting to be an old woman," continued Mrs. Ware, "and there are some things, dear, that I want to give you."

Nancy remembered an old-fashioned red jewel-case with gilt clawfeet, that her aunt used to open for her when she was a child. There were quaint breast-pins in this case, and mourning rings that belonged to a past generation; and there were two or three ornaments of great value.

"I know you do not care about jewelry, Nancy," said Mrs. Ware, — and in this she was mistaken, for Nancy loved everything that was beautiful: "it is not such things that I am going to give you; whatever ornaments I have will go to Alice, for my girls have no use for them in their quiet life. No, Nancy dear, what I mean to give you would have no value to any one but me, and you. I know you will care for them as I do. If I were to die suddenly, most of them would be thrown away, and I want you to keep them for my sake and his."

Mrs. Ware took a pasteboard box out of the drawer and brought it in.

"This was Edmund's first dress," she said, as she held up the dainty gossamer frock.

"Oh, Aunt Margaret, what a beautiful thing!" cried Nancy, "and what exquisite stitches! Did you make it yourself?"

"Yes, every stitch."

"How small he was!" said Nancy, and the tears came into her eyes when she thought of the strong man as a helpless baby. She had a quick revelation of the hopes and prayers that had gone into the making of this little frock.

"Is it really for me?" she asked. "It seems as if Alice ought to have it."

"No, I am going to give her the embroidered christening dress. I want you to keep his first little dress, Nancy, on account of the stitches that I have wrought into it."

Nancy took the dainty thing and folded it with loving hands.

"You have made me so rich," she said.

Her aunt next took out some sheets of paper scribbled over with crazy little pictures drawn with colored lead pencils.

Nancy smiled as she saw Edmund's bold attempts at portraying the visions of a lively imagination. One of the pictures was a war scene, and lest his friends should be in doubt as to what he meant to depict he had written across the top, "A Battel."

"I always thought Edmund would have made a great artist if he had not become a doctor," said his mother.

His cousin looked up with laughing eyes. To her surprise she found that her aunt was in earnest.

"See how spirited that sketch is," and Mrs. Ware pointed to a red object with wobbly legs and curly horns jumping over a yellow moon with a grinning face. "The dear boy never stopped at anything. Of course the drawing is poor, but he has the artist instinct in seizing the salient point, and he such a little, little boy."

Mrs. Ware next showed her a faded blue-and-white sock and a microscopic shoe.

"Nancy, I do not know that even you will care for these treasures of mine, or understand why I kept them. It was his first sock, and his sturdy little foot kicked a hole through it almost at once. Oh, Nancy, he was such a darling baby, so full of life and sometimes so naughty. And this was his first shoe. He lost the mate; he threw it into the well; I scolded him, and then I felt so sorry and ashamed, that I put the little shoe in my locked drawer, and it has been here all these years. Can you understand how any one can be so foolish, Nancy darling?"

"Yes, Aunt Margaret, I am just as foolish myself."

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE WITH THE PURPLE WINDOWS

MEANWHILE Edmund's mind was full of Alice, and the future which they were to share together seemed to stretch away like the snowy wood road where he had walked with Nancy, the pines on each side being half revealed and half shrouded, but seeming to grow closer and closer together as the long vista stretched away until the arched trees met each other at the horizon line.

As he went from his hotel in Boston to the house where Alice lived, the cutting east wind reminded him forcibly of certain trenchant remarks he had formerly made concerning Boston's climate and inhabitants. He used to have an especial dislike for the made land, with its unvarying houses, suggesting life on a monotonous pattern that did not appeal to his unconventional temperament. And yet it was in the least attractive of all the alphabetical streets, and in the most conventional of brick blocks, that he had found his treasure.

When the door was opened for him by a trim maid, he saw Alice coming down the staircase.

As the dim gaslight fell on her dark hair and on the soft folds of her gray gown, she made one of those pictures that are destined to recur to the mind again and again. A moment later, her hand clasp, strong and firm, and the look in her blue eyes expressed a depth of feeling that his cousin Nancy's ardent embraces had not suggested. The one word "Edmund," in her rich voice, had a penetrating quality that moved him to his heart's depths, as he stooped to kiss her.

Edmund and Alice spent a blissful evening chaperoned by his gentle aunt Mildred, who left them immediately after dinner and retreated to the cold reception room, where she shivered, wrapped up in a blanket shawl, but was sustained by the romantic memories of her own youth.

Edmund's wonder at having gained the love of such a woman as Alice grew stronger as the hours passed. She was so reserved as to suggest a perfectly balanced character, and she had almost never talked about herself to him before; so her confidences revealed a side of her that was a surprise to him.

"I can't believe that you love me so much," she said once. "I have never in all my life been first to any one, except to people for whom I could not care. When other men have told me they loved me, it seemed as if the real 'me' shriveled up and retreated into a corner. Other men have wanted to marry me for such inade-

quate reasons, but you walked straight into my heart without asking my leave, and I have no power to drive you out. Why do you love me so much?"

And when he told her, she listened with the breathless eagerness of a child.

"All my life I have loved people and been unable to express myself," she confessed, "and it has been a torture to me that they have never known how much I cared."

He drew her out on the theme of her solitary childhood, and she told him how she used to sit in the house that overlooked Worcester Square, with her face pressed against the window-pane, watching the passers by, and wishing she could run out and beg the children to come in and play with her. He felt so sorry for the lonely little girl that it seemed almost unbearable.

"If I had only known," he said. "I had such a happy-go-lucky childhood; there were always such nice people in it, and such a lot of them."

And then Alice told him of the brightest spot in her childhood, her weekly visits to her grandmother who lived on Beacon Street in one of the houses with purple windows.

Madam Lancaster had found it hard to reconcile herself to the marriage of her only daughter to a man not in her set, and she had imbued her granddaughter at an early age with a pride in her long line of cultivated and distinguished an-

cestors, and with a taste for all the ultra refinements of life. Alice had always loved the house on Beacon Street, crowded with old furniture that spoke of those far-away ancestors; she had a reverence for the painted men and women who looked down at her from the walls. Apparently the very trees in Worcester Square had had a ragged look that was not shared by those on Beacon Hill, and spring never seemed so attractive as when it came like a green mist over Boston Common. It seemed pathetic that this was all she knew of spring, when he thought of the wonderful days that he had spent as a child in the Edgefield woods.

"I wish you would take me to see that house in Worcester Square," he said. He felt that it possessed a deep human interest, for there two people had lived who had been so sufficient to each other as to shut out their lonely little child.

"Oh, I don't want to show you that house," she replied, "but I will take you to see my grandmother, and the dear house that always stood for sunshine in my sombre childhood."

All that he heard of Alice's grandmother served to make their meeting a formidable ordeal. It was put off from day to day, as Madam Lancaster was an invalid; but the afternoon came at last when Edmund found himself mounting the steps of the house on Beacon Hill. The door was opened by a man-servant, so dignified and

elderly in appearance that Edmund felt as if he had always been an indispensable adjunct to that historic spot. The two long parlors were crowded with chairs, tables, and sofas of rare old mahogany, and the walls were occupied by ancient mirrors with gilt frames, and Copley and Stuart portraits. The room was subdued by the light that came in through the purple windows. The very air seemed laden with the breath of an exotic existence, for there was a bowl of tuberoses on one table and of lilies of the valley on another.

"Is n't this a charming old room?" Alice asked.

"Yes, very charming."

Nevertheless it had a depressing effect on him. Everything looked as if it had been put there for a definite purpose and must not be made to vary its position by a hair's breadth. A silver paper-cutter and a slender ivory one were lying on the nearest table, and Edmund had an insane impulse to test his strength and show his independence to his surroundings by bending the ivory one backward and breaking it. He resisted this vagrant impulse with difficulty. He felt that the apartment had been arranged as a memorial to the dead rather than with a view to the comfort of the living. The stillness seemed so profound that he instinctively lowered his voice when he spoke to Alice.

"This is the room you loved so when you

were a little girl?" he asked tenderly. "I fancy it has not changed much since then?"

"It is almost the same. You can imagine what it was to a beauty-loving child to come into this quiet spot."

They heard the sound of light steps on the thick carpet and the rustle of silk skirts as Madam Lancaster glided into the room. She was an impressive figure in her widow's cap and trailing black dress, and Dr. Ware felt her charm at once in spite of her coldness, for she had unusual beauty and a delightful voice. She held out her hand to him with the accumulated dignity of generations. She asked him if he would not take the seat next to her.

He looked over at Alice as if in her alone he could find the wisdom to guide him through the coming interview, but Alice presently slipped out of the room.

"I am glad to have a little talk with you alone," Madam Lancaster said to Edmund. "It is a relief to see you, for I will not hide from you that my granddaughter's engagement to a stranger to me has given me some anxiety, although I have liked all I have heard of you."

Madam Lancaster then gave him at some length a description of Alice's present rich and varied life with its social, philanthropic, and musical interests.

"She has always been accustomed to ease and

luxury," Madam Lancaster went on; "she has never had to do anything for herself, and is therefore peculiarly unfitted to be the wife of a man with a limited income, and then it seems, too, as if she would have no chance to gratify any of her tastes in a small New England town."

Ideas were surging in Edmund's brain, but a certain coolness of temperament on the part of his interlocutor made him doubt the expediency of uttering them. He longed to ask her if she had never been in love, but he felt that any allusion to the primal instincts of the race would do him more harm than good. Surely even in her younger days this self-contained woman could not have known that rekindling of life which makes the common ways a joyous pilgrimage. He wondered what part Mr. Lancaster had played in the stage setting of this lady who seemed to find social and intellectual tastes sufficient for her daily food. And yet, perhaps she too had had her days of romance. Even now she was very beautiful, and must once have been deeply loved. It was strange that a woman who was older than his mother should know so little of the world. She seemed the product of a life so exceptional as to be scarcely normal. For a moment he felt as if a vision had been granted him of what Alice would grow to be in the future years, if she were left in this environment; but, thank heaven, he had rescued her,

and if her life would be less easy, it would be vital.

Finding that he was silent, Madam Lancaster began to question him categorically. "I suppose there is no society in Edgefield, outside of your own charming family circle?"

"I don't quite know what you mean by society."

The Socratic method of reply gave him a little more time to put his thoughts in order. He had an uncomfortable sense of being classed as a social inferior, and longed to tell her how when he was traveling abroad he had met a German prince who had shown him great kindness, and that afterwards, when he had been presented at the German court, he had felt as much at home as he did in Edgefield.

Madam Lancaster proceeded to define society; it was not an elastic term according to her; and all the time she was speaking, the light shone softly in through the purple windows. Henceforth they would always stand to him for a certain type of life.

"I am afraid we have no society in your sense of the word," he said. "We all dine in the middle of the day, and our great pleasure is the out-of-door life."

"I suppose it is hard to get books so far from town?" she suggested.

Edmund thought of his mother's table, where

the latest magazines were scattered about in company with formidable volumes in English, and lighter literature in French and German.

"My mother is a great reader," he said. "Books always gravitate to those who care for them, and in the country we have a great deal of time to read. As for philanthropy, I am afraid there is only too much chance for that. You know what a small country town with mills in it is like?"

"I hope Alice will not have to be mixed up with such people."

"No. The mills are at the other end of the town; one does not have to meet the people. I only meant that if Alice wants a field for philanthropy, she will find it."

"She is too young to undertake such work," said her grandmother, decisively. "Of course you have no music?"

"No. Alice's singing will give us all the more pleasure for that reason."

And all the time that picture of the Edgefield woods was growing clearer and clearer, until he felt that it was treason to his better self not to show it, and finally he spoke, hardly expecting to be understood.

"I don't know whether I can make you feel the charm of the country, your life has been so different; but I can see how much you care for beauty. I feel that in the country

we come face to face with it. If you could go into the Edgefield woods in early spring when the pink arbutus first comes, and get the breath of the pines when the south wind is blowing, and see the clouds floating overhead, and the squirrels scurrying by, and hear the birds, you would feel as if nothing else you had ever known in the way of beauty could be weighed against it for a single moment. You would feel as if all you people in cities were the artificial products, and as if it were we who are in the country who live. And in summer when you take a canoe along the winding river and the branches meet overhead, and in autumn when the leaves have turned, but perhaps most of all, now in winter, when the snow lies three feet deep in the woods, we have a beauty that you cannot imagine. What have you to compare with it? And when this life in the country is shared with the person you love best, and is a life full of opportunities for doing good, and with leisure for companionship, what better could you ask for Alice?"

Madam Lancaster smiled at him indulgently.

"You are a dreamer, and you are young," she said. "It is nothing personal to you that I am afraid of, it is the conditions. I am speaking to you very frankly. Do you believe a girl brought up as Alice has been, a girl who has her worldly side and who cares for all the conventions, the little distinctions that the social world in Boston

demands, could be happy, for long, in the country?"

"If I did not think so, I should not have asked her to be my wife."

"And she tells me you want to marry her in April. That seems so sudden."

"Does it? It seems an age to me."

Madam Lancaster was strongly drawn to this young man, whose charm of person and manner went far towards reconciling her to her granddaughter's choice. After all, perhaps their life in the country would be only for a few years; he had talent, he might rise in his profession and in time have a Boston practice; he was far more attractive than Joe Bates, the rich young stockbroker whom all Alice's friends had expected her to marry; but April was coming in less than three months! Madam Lancaster felt it would be far wiser if Alice had more time in which to make sure of herself. As the light streamed in through the purple windows she talked on and on in gentle tones, of her interest in Alice. She told Edmund of their quiet months together at Nahant. All she would ask would be one more summer; she would be ready to part with her granddaughter early in September; it was so short a time for the young to wait, and it would be a priceless boon to her, for she had not many more summers to live.

Edmund was softened by her eloquence,

although his professional eye felt that the gentle but determined invalid before him stood an excellent chance of living for a score of years. She told him, among other things, that he and Alice could have her house at Nahant in September for their honeymoon, and he tried to be properly grateful, although he had dreamed of a wedding journey a little farther from the centre of civilization. They were still talking of the future when Alice came back.

"I think I have persuaded Dr. Ware to let me have you for one more summer," said her grandmother. "We shall hope to see him often. He says he has never been at Nahant. We shall take such pleasure in showing it to him."

The young people exchanged glances, and a wave as cold as if it had come straight from the place in question swept from one to the other. He was too sore and she too proud to protest.

As they left the house on Beacon Hill, the sun was setting. It was shining like a red ball of fire at the end of the city streets. The snow which was black at the crossings was white in the Common. Edmund breathed freer as he came out into the crisp air.

"Isn't the sunset beautiful?" said Alice.

"Yes, it is; but oh, my dear, how I long to show you the beauty of the country!"

CHAPTER IV

AT THE HOWLAND FARM

DR. WARE had a period of depression after his return to Edgefield. He felt as if a penetrating frost had nipped the buds of his choicest dreams and fancies: fortunately it could not touch the roots, which had a strong growth; but the postponement of his marriage, together with Madam Lancaster's critical attitude, took away that sense of the wonderful joy of life that had been his. He longed for his cousin Nancy, who had always been his confidante, but Nancy was not likely to come to Edgefield again until summer, as she was kept closely at home by the continued indisposition of her mother.

One afternoon as Edmund was walking through the village Kate Howland flashed past him, driving a spirited horse. He had an impression of warmth and cheer to the accompaniment of merry sleigh-bells. She stopped at the grocer's, where she went in and presently returned with the clerk, who filled the sleigh with parcels. She overtook Edmund.

"How do you do, Ed?" she called out cheerily. "Are you in too much of a hurry to speak to your old friends?"

"I am never in too much of a hurry to speak to you, Kate."

"I am glad you mentioned it. I never should have known it if you had n't told me. Won't you ride home with me and stay to supper? Andrew 'll be real glad to see you."

Now that Kate was happily married, Edmund forgot that he had so recently wished never to see or hear of her again. Indeed, on this bleak winter day the prospect of having a cozy meal with two of his friends who liked him in a whole-souled, uncritical way was an attractive one. And afterwards, as he sat in the Howlands' pleasant living-room, where some huge logs were burning in the large, old-fashioned fireplace, he revised his opinion concerning Andrew's marriage.

It was a restful room and it satisfied Edmund's eye as entirely as Andrew himself satisfied his mind. The simple, straight-backed, wooden chairs and plain table were in harmony with the old oak beams in the ceiling and the wainscoted walls. Kate might be ordinary according to the standards of the dwellers in houses with purple windows; she had, in fact, often jarred on his own taste; but was she any more ordinary in her soul than that fastidious lady who lived on Beacon Hill? Each frankly longed for the good things of the world. To be sure, Kate's fleshpots were of a kind that would have made Madam

Lancaster raise her eyebrows in quiet disdain, but even Kate, with all her fondness for creature comforts, did not value them more highly than affection, or she could not have married Andrew.

"I am going to have that spinning-wheel taken upstairs, and get some plush furniture as soon as I can," Kate said, as she saw Dr. Ware's eyes travel around the room.

"Don't you do it, Kate, don't touch this room. It is a perfect living-room for a farmhouse. You are a clever enough woman to see that you must make the most out of the materials you have. If you try to change the farmhouse, you will have a hybrid; you will spoil the original stock, and you won't get a good thing in its place."

"You do sometimes hit the nail on the head," she conceded; "but if one happens to have a hankering for plush furniture —"

"Then you should n't have married Andrew Howland. He is the best man I know and the truest gentleman, but he is a farmer through and through, and he would be miserable if you changed his surroundings. You have the good sense to appreciate Andrew. Let him take the lead. You do what you can to fill out his life. He adores the ground you walk on, so you can afford to be generous."

"Are you going to take a Sunday-school class, Ed?"

“No, nothing short of the pulpit will satisfy me.”

They both laughed gayly, but Edmund was not to be so easily turned from the subject in hand.

“Most of the unhappy marriages,” he went on, “come from the fact that the wife has n’t sense enough to see that she can’t often have the life she wants combined with the man she wants; and if she chooses the man, she ’s got to learn to adapt herself to him, or there ’ll be trouble.”

“And how about the man adapting himself?” Kate inquired.

“Well, if the man is Andrew, he ’ll try to do it; but you know yourself he can’t succeed, and he ’ll always feel that he never comes quite up to your standard; so don’t let any plush furniture come into this house.”

Kate’s happiness gave a softening effect to her beauty. Her coils of red hair shone like copper in the firelight. She wore a gown of a shade that was fashionable at the time, known as peacock blue. There were iridescent colors in the vest, suggesting the eyes in the spreading tail. She seemed as satisfied with it as the peacock does with his plumage, and it would not have been possible for a mere masculine spectator not to share in her admiration.

Andrew came in and half apologetically took her hand.

“Oh, you need n’t mind Ed,” Kate observed.

"He is used to spooning. By the way, when are you going to get married?"

At this point Edmund owned to himself that there were advantages in the manners of Beacon Hill.

"The first of September."

"Not until September? Marcia told me the wedding was to be in April. So that is why you look as if you had just come from a funeral. Why are n't you to be married in April?"

Andrew slipped out of the room at this point. There were "chores" that had to be done in the barn.

"You see Miss Sumner always spends three months with her grandmother at Nahant, and Madam Lancaster wants to have her for this last summer."

"You don't mean that Alice's grandmother can't spare her! Good gracious, what is the matter with the old lady? Has she got an incurable disease?"

"Nothing worse than selfishness, but I am afraid it is incurable."

Edmund had not meant to speak in this way of Alice's grandmother, but he had not been accustomed to select his words when he talked to Kate, and the old habit still held. Indeed, there never had been any use in trying to disguise the truth from her.

"And has n't Alice anything to say?"

“Miss Sumner is very unselfish, and she is under great obligations to her grandmother.”

“And how about you?”

“Oh, I’m all right. As Madam Lancaster said, ‘we are young.’”

“And so you let things go like that?”

“Miss Sumner seemed satisfied.”

“Don’t you know girls any better than that, Ed Ware? You don’t suppose Miss Sumner,— if you won’t allow me to speak of her as ‘Alice,’ and apparently you won’t,—or any proud-spirited girl is going to throw herself at your head? I’d like to see any grandmother prevent my marrying Andrew, when I’d got round to it. You take the first train to Boston to-morrow morning and tell Miss Sumner you can’t stand it, living along like this, away from her. Tell her you want to have the wedding the first of June, and she’ll compromise on the last of June, you see if she does n’t, and Nancy and her mother can spend the summer with the old lady.”

“It is so easy to make plans for other people,” Edmund said.

The idea, however, although it seemed preposterous at first, appealed to him more and more strongly. Kate had a certain rough and ready common sense that had stood him in good stead more than once. He wondered that she should seem so happy, and felt that he had never done

her justice and that she had been in love with Andrew when she married him; and, indeed, Kate had already persuaded herself that Andrew was the only man who could have made her happy. Even in her inconstancy she had always been constant to her ideal of what marriage was to mean for her, and she knew now that no one else would have had such an unbounded admiration for her, or have given her her own way so unquestioningly. If she had married Edmund Ware, she would have been most unhappy, she told herself, for he would have seen all her faults, and would have made her give up to him at every point, but she could not let him go out of her life without making an effort to keep him as a dear and intimate friend. She reasoned that if he took her advice and it succeeded, his gratitude would make it possible for her to be friends with his wife, who might be very useful to her with her knowledge of the city fashions.

Kate made a gracious hostess. She brought out for supper crisp brown doughnuts that had been fried to perfection by her own hands, ham and eggs, baked apples and new cider, that were the products of the farm.

It seemed to Kate that the least Edmund could do in return for her advice and hospitality, would be to write and tell her the result of his journey to Boston, for she heard in a roundabout way that he went there before the week was over. A little

later she learned through Sophia Ware that her brother was to be married in June.

It was a great disappointment to Kate that she and Andrew could not go to Edmund's wedding; but the fact that they were among the few Edgefield friends who were invited to the reception, as well as to the church, made her feel that they were included in that select circle which might literally be called the "upper ten."

After the wedding was over she besieged her acquaintances for a detailed description of it. They all agreed that the bride was very beautiful and that the presents were superb. Some of them were enthusiastic over Alice, while others thought her cold, and were more interested in the fortunes of Nancy, whom all Edgefield loved. Nancy had attracted a large share of attention because Joseph Bates, the young millionaire, who had formerly been devoted to Alice, had seemed, on the occasion of the wedding, to have neither eyes nor ears for any one but Nancy.

When Kate learned that the married pair were to take a flying trip to Europe for their wedding journey, she was filled with envy.

"I don't see how some people can be so absolutely regardless of everything but their own pleasure," she said to Andrew. "I dare say Ed's mother 'll die while he's gone, she's so delicate. That's just the way things happen in this world."

In spite of this gloomy prediction, Mrs. Ware was in a flourishing condition when her son and his wife returned in October.

Kate was sorry she could not go to church with Andrew, the first Sunday after their arrival, but her energies were fully occupied with her two months' old baby. As her husband was leaving the house she charged him to give her a minute description of the bride.

"Well, what is she like, Andrew?" Kate asked eagerly, as they were sitting down to their Sunday dinner.

Andrew looked up with a dreamy expression in his blue eyes. "She is wonderful; I never saw any one like her. She is a lady, finished and fine to her finger-tips; she is a great lady, with the air of a different world about her."

"What sort of clothes did she have on?" Kate inquired tartly.

Andrew did not appear to heed the question. "What I noticed chiefly was her wonderful smile," he said. "When Edmund introduced me, she was as kind as if I had been an old friend."

"I suppose she had on something else besides the smile; that would be a little chilly covering for such cold weather. What else did she wear?"

"Something dark."

"Did she have on a bonnet or a hat?"

"I don't know; there were feathers on it. She

had on furs, I think. She asked me to come back to dinner."

"She did? What did she suppose was going to happen to me?"

"I don't suppose she thought about you."

"The next time she asks you, you 'd better go, since she is so much more of a lady than I am. It is a pity you did n't marry somebody like that. I don't suppose she could have fried doughnuts for you, or made cider, or put up preserves, but perhaps you would n't mind not having anything good to eat, so long as your wife was a lady to her finger-tips and wore a beautiful smile."

Andrew came around to Kate's end of the table and took her hand awkwardly. "Now, Kitty, you know I 'd rather have you than any woman in the world. Mrs. Ware is the kind of person to reverence and you are the kind to love. I expect you 'll like Mrs. Ware as much as I do."

"Oh! I 've got to like her; she 'll be so useful to me; and just as soon as I can find somebody to take care of my Dicky bird," and she glanced at the sleeping Richard, who was lying in the clothes basket, "I 'm going to put on my best duds and show Ed Ware's wife that there is such a thing as style in Edgefield. His sisters, poor dears, don't know what the word means."

CHAPTER V

THE FIRST CALL

It was some weeks before Kate was able to take "an afternoon off," but at last she found herself in the Wares' parlor, waiting for Alice to come down. She thought the room was too cold in tone, and she looked in vain for the wedding present that she and Andrew had given them. It was a picture of "The Huguenot Lovers," in a frame that Andrew had made with his own hands, and that she had decorated with spatterwork. He had wanted to give them the "Sistine Madonna," but she had felt that it would be better to send something a little more "up-to-date." They had gathered the ferns, which she used for the border of the frame, in the woods where she had played with Edmund and Andrew when they were children, and Kate had felt that this unique gift, combining sentiment and spatterwork, which was the craze of the day in Edgefield, would mark "Mr. and Mrs. Andrew L. Howland" in Alice's mind as persons of taste and refinement, whom she would be eager to know. She did not think any of the pictures half so attractive, and their frames were very commonplace. The slight

that had been put upon their gift cut Kate to the quick, and the length of time before Mrs. Ware came down added to her sense of injury.

When Mrs. Howland's card was brought to her, Alice was in her little upstairs sewing-room darning her husband's socks. The occupation was still so new to her that a glamour hung around it. The charm of those first months of her married life, when she had Edmund wholly to herself, and they shared those wonderful European experiences, had given place to the more sober ways of everyday life. Alice had been in Edgefield only a few weeks, but she already began to resent those claims on her husband which kept them apart for so many hours of the day. She tried to do her duty by Edmund's family and to be polite to his friends, but her chief desire was to secure as many uninterrupted hours with him as possible. This afternoon he had promised to take her on a long drive into the country. The arrival of the mail had given her a foreboding of anxiety which she longed to share with him. Her grandmother wrote as if Nancy's engagement to Joseph Bates were a foregone conclusion. Now that Alice knew the overwhelming feeling of a great love, she could not bear to have her step-sister make the mistake of marrying for gratitude. It seemed impossible that she herself had once felt that to marry Joseph Bates would be a wise step, so

little did the power that money brings count with her now. She knew that Nancy was not ambitious and she feared that Joseph Bates could never make her happy. She was preoccupied with these thoughts when the trim young maid, who was Mrs. Hart's successor, brought up Kate's card.

"Mrs. Andrew L. Howland," Alice read. "I have never heard of her. I suppose I must see her." She stopped to put on her hat so that she need not detain Edmund when he came.

Alice went forward with outstretched hand to meet Kate, and lied bravely. "I am so glad to see you," she said. Then the two women looked at each other for a long moment.

Kate was resplendent in an imitation seal-skin coat and a peacock-blue hat with huge green-and-blue wings, and a large gilt buckle studded with imitation jewels. She wore a veil with very large black spots. In all her experience of Edmund's patients and friends Alice had never come across any one like this.

Kate on her side noted the perfect fit of Mrs. Ware's severely plain dark blue gown, and it irritated her. Alice's quiet black hat with its single long ostrich feather angered her still further. It was so rude of Mrs. Ware to flaunt this patent sign that the interview was to be a brief one.

"I am expecting Dr. Ware in a few minutes

to take me for a drive," Alice said. "Do sit in that armchair by the fire. It was so kind of you to come to see me."

"I should have come long ago," said Kate, relenting a little, "except that I have been kept busy with my baby."

"Oh, you have a baby," and Alice warmed at once. She could skillfully tide over a few minutes by getting Mrs. Howland to give her an inventory of her child's charms.

"How old is it?" she asked.

"He 'll be two months old next Thursday, but he's very large of his age; grandfather has nicknamed him 'Buster.' Oh, you've never met my grandfather, of course, but Ed must have told you about him; you've heard him speak, most likely, of old Gideon Baker, who kept the Edgefield House?"

"No," said Alice, growing more and more frigid in her manner.

"What is your baby's name?" she asked presently.

"Richard Marchant; he's named for my father. My father was a lawyer." Her voice lingered with pride over the word. "He died when I was five, and then mother and I moved to North Edgefield and lived near the Wares. When mother died two years ago, grandfather came to live with me. He's gone to live in Concord now with his oldest daughter, my aunt

Sarah. Maybe you've heard Ed speak of the Abraham Kellys?"

"No," said Alice, again. "Is your baby dark or light?" she inquired, trying to get the conversation away from the topics which would display her own ignorance.

"He's dark, thank goodness, like the Bakers. I am so glad, for I hate red hair in a man. He's awfully cute."

"Have you any other children?" Two or three more little people would keep the ball going until Edmund came.

"Richard is my only child," Kate replied with some asperity, as she reflected how little Edmund had told his wife about her. "I was only married on the second of last December. I thought maybe Ed had told you about my wedding. He was the life of the occasion."

Alice felt herself growing stiffer and colder. The second of December was her stepmother's birthday, and Alice had refused to go to the theatre with her and Nancy, in order that she could have a quiet evening to write to Edmund and dream of her future. And while she was thus occupied, he had been the life of the company at this impossible woman's wedding. How had he ever chanced to know her? Perhaps her family were patients of his, or, perhaps — she remembered it all now, Howland was the name of that quiet man with the kind eyes whom Edmund had in-

roduced to her as one of his best friends. This must be his wife. These were the people who had given them "The Huguenot Lovers" in that hideous spatter-work frame. She had never told Edmund how much she disliked the gift, but had put it in his dressing-room on the plea of its being so full of associations for him.

"I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Howland," Alice said. "Dr. Ware has spoken to me so warmly of their friendship."

"Yes?" Kate did not like being ignored in this way. "We were all at school together from the primary up. I can remember Ed Ware ever since I was knee-high to a grasshopper." She paused and looked deliberately at Alice before she decided whether to go on; she was sure by a sideways glance that her hostess gave out of the window, down the snowy road, that she was longing to have the call over, and this decided her.

"Ed was awfully good to me when I was a schoolgirl," she continued. "He used to take my books home for me every day."

"It is just what I should suppose he would do," Alice said with an effort. "Dr. Ware is always very kind."

"The nasty thing!" thought Kate, growing more and more angry. "I'll take down her pride! The idea of her 'Dr. Ware-ing' Ed to me. I believe," she went on sweetly, "that I was the first girl Ed fell in love with." She noticed Mrs.

Ware's change of color and added reassuringly, "Oh, you need n't be jealous; it all happened a long time ago."

"The insufferable woman," Alice thought. Her one desire was to get her visitor out of the house. She did not believe that Mrs. Howland was telling the truth, but the mere possibility that this flashily dressed, ill-bred woman had caught Edmund's fancy even for an idle hour, seemed to cheapen his relation to herself. If he could have found amusement in the society of this sort of person, his was not the sensitive, highly strung nature she had always fancied it.

"Life is an odd thing," Kate was saying. "When I was in the High School, all the girls teased me about Ed Ware. I was a Marchant, you know, and I was very proud of the name. I thought it grand, a much better name than Ware. 'Earthen Ware,' we used to call Ed. We liked to tease him because he looked so like a young duke. I remember once we all went skating and he and Andrew almost came to blows on account of me. I was a regular tomboy, Mrs. Ware; I don't suppose you ever knew any one like me. I was off with the boys all the time. They were lots more fun than the girls. Now you look as if you'd always been quiet and ladylike; I guess you liked to play with the girls best. My brother Jim was Ed's best friend, and he and Andrew and I and my uncle Gideon,—he's only two years

older than me, so I never think of him as my uncle,—were always together. Gideon and Ed never could get on. I presume you've known Dr. Gideon Patrick Baker in Boston? He went to Harvard and to the Medical School."

"I don't remember having seen him. It's such an unusual name I think I should recall it if I had ever heard it."

"I guess he's known in Boston as Dr. G. P. Baker; he is n't very proud of the Patrick."

"Dr. Ware is coming," Alice said in accents of relief. "I am afraid I shall have to ask you to excuse me, as he never likes to be kept waiting."

"Indeed he does n't," Kate agreed with a reminiscent laugh.

Edmund had caught sight of Kate at the window. They had not met since she had given him that excellent advice which had borne such rich fruit. He remembered with a pang of conscience that he had never thanked her for it.

He came in hastily just as Kate was leaving the room.

"There is no hurry, Alice," he said. "Mrs. Howland does n't get away from home very often. Do come back, Kate. I'm delighted to see you. How is the youngster?"

"Oh, he's splendid."

Kate had meant to ask Edmund and his wife to come to Richard's christening, which was to take place the next week, but now that she had

seen Mrs. Ware she felt that her presence would cast too great a shadow over the company. Kate had too much pride, however, to acknowledge her discomfiture, so she gave Edmund one of her brightest smiles, and told him that he must come to see the baby.

“I ’ve been meaning to come ever since I got home.”

“Now you can bring Mrs. Ware with you, Ed. I know she will enjoy seeing the brook and the woods and the other places where we all used to play together. I have been having such a pleasant call on your wife.”

CHAPTER VI

JOSEPH BATES

As Edmund drove Alice along the snowy road that afternoon, they did not refer to Mrs. Howland's call. Alice was too reserved and too proud to question her husband concerning the truth of her visitor's statements. She had received a shock that had taken away the fine edge of her enthusiasm, but the groundwork of her happiness remained secure. Edmund had told her many times that he had never cared for any woman as he cared for her, and she would try to rest content with this assurance. Once or twice before, she had had a hint that Edmund's taste was not in all things so fastidious as hers, but this was the first full revelation of the difference that their education and surroundings had made in their judgment of people. She was sure that if Edmund's early advantages had been equal to her own, he could not have failed to see the vulgarity of Kate Howland. Mrs. Howland's call had served to accentuate Alice's growing sense of the uncongeniality of her social life in Edgefield. She had told Edmund the news in Madam Lancaster's letter before they started on their drive,

and his mind was too full of his cousin to have any thoughts to spare for Kate Howland.

"Nancy must n't be allowed to marry that man," he said. "What is your grandmother thinking of? But I dare say it is all a mistake. Nancy is a darling, but she is n't at all the sort of girl a man would want to marry."

"Why not?"

"She's such a plain little thing, and after caring for you as he did, and he the sort of man he is, — a man whose principal interests are making money, and good living, and horses, — how could such a man care for Nancy? The idea is preposterous! What would they have in common? He is like a big, gaudy sunflower, and she is a sensitive plant."

"There is no mistake about his wanting to marry her. Grandmother says she refused him at first, but that she thinks he has won her over."

"It's a crime for a man like that to step in and carry off an exquisite young girl. The law ought to forbid the banns."

Alice looked at Edmund in sheer amazement, for one of his chief attractions in her eyes had been that he seemed as gentle and reasonable as a woman; and it was a shock to find that his jealousy was as crudely masculine as if he belonged to that world of the counting-house that she thought she had left forever behind her.

"Edmund, I can't let you go on saying such

things about my father's partner, a man who has always had a record for unimpeachable honor in the business world. You don't know anything about him except by hearsay. You have merely seen him passing in the street."

"That was quite enough."

"There are a great many good things about Joe Bates," Alice continued; "you can't help feeling a sense of his power. If he wants a thing, he wants it very much, and it is hard to stand up against him."

"You managed to."

"Because you came. Until I saw you I had the feeling that, sooner or later, Joe Bates would break down my opposition by sheer persistence, and his money seemed to offer a dazzling vision of power. It was a temptation to me, but I am sure it does n't tempt Nancy."

"Then what, under heaven, does tempt her?"

"She is grateful to him. Just think what opportunities he had to be kind to her through her mother's illness, and at the time of her death."

"And we might have been here if they had only cabled to us; but who could have thought from the letters that Aunt Mildred would not live until we got home? We ought to have insisted on Nancy's coming back with us when we were in Boston."

Alice, too, was a little uneasy on this head. She had felt that Nancy's presence would be a

check on their perfect happiness, and so she had easily persuaded herself that it was better for her step-sister to stay on with Madam Lancaster, who was only too glad to keep her. Alice had vaguely suggested a visit in the spring; she felt sure that Nancy would prefer to be in Boston until her furniture was stored and her house made ready for the new occupants. Alice saw it all clearly now; because the two whom she loved best had been selfishly absorbed in their own happiness, Nancy had turned to the person who had seemed to need her most.

"Edmund," Alice said, "I think we had better go to Boston next week and bring Nancy back with us for a visit. The change will give her something else to think about, and if she is away from Joe Bates, she will be better able to make up her mind as to whether she really cares for him."

"Really cares for him! How can she? But it must be owing to your grandmother's influence. Your grandmother is a very charming person, but she does have worldly views about the advantage of money. If Nancy had only been in Edgefield, this would never have happened."

Meanwhile Nancy, too, was being driven along snowy roads, and as Joseph Bates took her through Boston's most beautiful suburb, it seemed to her a poor imitation of the country she knew and loved in Edgefield. When he left

her at Madam Lancaster's door, she ran quickly upstairs and shut herself into her little room at the top of the house. She asked herself how it had all happened, and if it were really true that she had promised to be his wife. She felt as if she had been swept along by a hurricane against which she had no power to stand. In all her life she had never been brought face to face with so strong a will. When did it all begin? As long ago as that day last winter when Joe had met Edmund and Alice walking together, and he had brought some flowers to Nancy's mother. She saw now that her sympathy and her hope that they might be friends had paved the way for all that followed. She had been so grateful to him for thinking of her mother, not realizing until later that the flowers had originally been intended for Alice. She went back over the whole scene. She had come down from her mother's sick room, and Joe had shoved a pasteboard-box towards her awkwardly, almost roughly.

"I 've brought some flowers to your mother," he said.

She opened the box and bent her head down over the blossoms, that her near-sighted eyes might take in their full perfection.

"Lilies-of-the-valley and orchids. How exquisite they are! How good of you!" she cried. "How did you know that lilies-of-the-valley are mother's favorite flower?"

It must have been her perfect unconsciousness and her enthusiasm and frank pleasure in his society that had attracted him, she decided, for it was a contrast to Alice's reserve. Before the afternoon was over he had asked the question that she then saw had brought him there.

"I met Alice walking with a light-haired, good-looking fellow. Is she engaged to him?"

Nancy turned her eyes away for very pity. "He is my cousin, Edmund Ware, the most delightful man in the whole world," she said.

"Is she engaged to him?"

She reflected that all the world would know the fact in a few days.

"I — I think so. It isn't out; I am sure she'll write to you herself, so don't tell her I said anything about it. She thinks I am such a sieve, and I am afraid I am."

Nancy had always been a confidante, ever since Edmund had told her his woes when she was a little girl in pinafores, and it was as natural for her to try to comfort people as it was for her to breathe. At the end of the long and intimate talk which followed, she felt that she could help this man by her friendship.

"I am so sorry," she said. "I shall miss Alice terribly myself. It seems as if I were losing them both, and as if the world were coming to pieces. Let's be friends," she begged.

He had gripped her hand as he left the room

and promised friendship. That was the beginning, and she had been foolish indeed not to know that this would be the end, but she had been too conscious of the inferiority of her looks to dream that she could supplant Alice in his heart. Now, as she sat looking over the chimney-pots, she felt like a frightened bird caught in a snare. She did not want to marry Joseph Bates, but when she had told him this, he had remarked bitterly that all women were alike. He had fancied her truer and sweeter than the rest of them; but it seemed she had been merely playing with him while he had been fool enough to think she really cared for him. He had first asked her to marry him in the summer at Nahant, and again, after her mother's death. She had been given the strength to refuse him, sustained by the hope that when Edmund and Alice came home, she could find a tower of strength in them; for had not Edmund once said that nothing would change his feeling for her, and that his new love made him care for every one else a hundred times more? Then he had come home, and he and Alice were too happy to have any thought for her. She was heart-broken over her mother's death, and very miserable at Madam Lancaster's, and so, on this winter afternoon when, for the third time, Joseph Bates had urged her to marry him, she had given a different answer, for they were such good friends

and she was so grateful to him; he was the only person in the whole world who seemed to need her.

When Edmund and Alice went to see Nancy at Madam Lancaster's a few days later, they were struck with the change in her. She looked even thinner and paler than when they had seen her after her mother's death.

Alice went up presently to her grandmother's room, feeling that it was only fair to leave the cousins together. Nancy, in her sombre mourning with the crêpe at her neck and sleeves, sat up primly in a straight-backed chair with her hands, usually so restless, folded in her lap. Picture after picture of her came into Edmund's mind, and they were always pictures full of motion. First, he saw her as an eager, impetuous, little girl, with her hair flying in the wind, as she raced him down a breezy hillside; and finally, he saw her as she looked when they took that last walk together a year ago. She seemed a child of the summer woods and the winter snows, and now, in this fashionable mourning, sitting in this room crowded with furniture and portraits, while the light shone in decorously through the purple windows, she seemed a new Nancy, a stranger whom he had never known.

"Nancy, you are unhappy," he said. "Come, little sister, we'll sit on the sofa together, and you shall tell me all about it, and I'll find a way of

escape for you just as I used to do when you were an enchanted princess, and I was your knight. Alice and I have come to take you home with us; it was her idea; she has such wonderful intuitions. She felt you were not happy from your last letter, and when Madam Lancaster wrote and told us — told us — that she thought — we feared — and so we have come to take you back with us for a long, long visit."

Nancy spoke very low. "You have come too late," she said.

"Nancy, that is not true. I know what you are thinking; a certain man has been very good to you and he wants to marry you; is n't it so? You like him, and are sorry for him, but that is no reason why you should be his for life. Nancy, do you love this man?"

Nancy dropped her eyes. "He has been very good to me, and I am very fond of him."

"But do you love him?" Edmund's eyes, the eyes of the practiced doctor, seemed to Nancy to pierce through all disguises to her very soul.

"I — I am very fond of him," she faltered.

"Nancy, you are young, and perhaps you do not know what love means. When I was your age, I did not know. I thought it was something that found one hot and left one cold, more pain than happiness, something that troubled one's peace of mind. I had loved like this more than once, and when it was over, there was nothing

left; and then Alice came and I knew what love meant. It was a gracious force, all beneficent, all blessed, a force that fructified the earth. It gave me the key to the knowledge of human hearts, and all my old fears vanished. There was no such thing as age, for age could not matter since we grew old together, and death that I used to dread, even death lost its terrors, since our love was so strong it seemed to make one sure of passing through the gateway to eternal life. Nancy, this is what it is to love."

And Nancy, listening to Edmund's words, as he told his love for another woman, knew in her heart that she, too, might have loved like this.

Edmund had taken her hand in his and drawn her towards him; he was looking at her once more with that eager, piercing glance, when there were footsteps in the hall, and Joseph Bates, burly and red-faced, burst into the room.

"What are you doing here with my girl?" he demanded.

Edmund dropped Nancy's hand and stood up to meet his foe, but Nancy, with the exaltation of Edmund's words still upon her, took his hand once more in hers.

"Joe," she said, "I want you to know my cousin Edmund, who has always been a brother to me. Edmund, this is Joseph Bates."

Nancy had put a trembling little hand on Joe's

arm, and under the influence of her touch he quieted down.

"Alice and I have come to take Nancy home with us for a little visit," Edmund began.

"Do you mean to go?" Joe asked her brusquely.

Nancy knew what he would have said if it had not been for her restraining touch. She was sure he was thinking that Edmund was the man who had robbed him of Alice. She had never felt so sorry for Joseph Bates, whose iron will and years of faithful service had not been able to win Alice's love. How intolerable it must have seemed to him when this light-haired stranger stepped in, and by the charm of his personality and the magic of a few softly spoken words, succeeded where he had failed. Nancy saw how impossible it would be for her to add to his sense of humiliation and bitterness.

Her silence was enough encouragement to make Edmund add, "She is looking so pale and thin, that I, as her doctor, am going to prescribe a few weeks of country air."

"I don't know whether this young lady has told you that she has given me the right to have more to say about what she does than any doctor, or cousin who is like a brother."

The two men looked at each other with hostile eyes. This was much worse than Edmund had feared, and now that he was brought face to face with this man of such different calibre from

himself, he felt more strongly than ever the necessity of rescuing Nancy from the lifelong misery of an ill-assorted marriage.

"I suppose we must both admit that Miss Caldwell is a free agent," he agreed, "and that whatever promise she may have given you under pressure need not prevent her spending a few weeks with her step-sister and me."

"She can most certainly do as she likes, but you can't blame me if I wonder why, when her step-sister and you had her interests so deeply at heart, you did n't come a little sooner to look after her." He gave a comprehensive glance around the room, and his eyes finally rested on the Copley and Stuart portraits. "I suppose you thought a young girl ought to find it sufficiently amusing to live with an old lady who keeps herself penned up in a place like this. Can you blame me if I tried to give her a little variety? Nancy, you can do as you like. I don't want to put any check on you, but you know what my plans were for you for the winter."

Edmund spoke quickly, fearing that Nancy would commit herself hastily, and longing, more than ever, to save his lifelong comrade. Nancy had never looked so appealing, so heart-breakingly sweet and lovable. He wondered how the spell that his own happiness had woven around him could have been so potent as to efface from his mind the memory of her claims.

"Nancy is coming back with us," he stated.

"As you yourself have said, Miss Caldwell is a free agent," Joe reminded him. "Nancy, will you go with him, or will you stay with me?"

Nancy had sunk into the nearest chair while the two men had been speaking, and now she looked first at one and then at the other. As she glanced at Edmund's kind face, the past seemed infinitely precious. She knew that whatever the future might hold for her, there could be in it nothing so full of joy as her childhood and her youth; and she knew also, that Edmund, her comrade, her big brother, was the one who had made this happiness; but the past was closed to her and she must open a new volume. She looked at Joseph Bates and she was afraid of the future, but he was kind and he loved her, and she had given him her promise. She was too loyal to think of drawing back. She got up and went swiftly across to where he stood.

"I am not going back with you," she told Edmund. Then she took one of Joe's big hands in hers. "I am going to marry Joseph Bates."

CHAPTER VII

THE REAL THING

NANCY was married very quietly at Madam Lancaster's during the Christmas holidays. Alice went to the wedding without her husband. She was wrapped about with such a gentle reserve and dignity that neither the boldest nor most unwary dared to question her statement that Dr. Ware was unavoidably kept at home by a patient. Edmund did in truth have a serious case on his hands, but Alice felt sure in her heart of hearts that he could have been at his cousin's wedding if he had not disapproved so strongly of her marriage.

"He is n't coming because he don't want me to marry you," Joe said to Nancy. "He hates me worse than poison."

"I am sure he would have come if he could. He has never failed me. I hope you will know each other well some time, for I do so want you to like each other," Nancy returned wistfully.

She looked very frail and young as she stood in her white dress beside the powerfully built man, who was henceforth to be her protector. There was a new gentleness in his face which augured

well for the future, and set many of Alice's fears at rest.

In April, upon the return of Joe and Nancy from a winter in the South, Alice went to Boston to spend a few days with them, and she was glad to see how much stronger and happier her step-sister looked.

It was during this brief visit that Alice first met Dr. G. P. Baker. He and Joe had been friends, after a fashion, ever since Joe's senior year in college, when he had come across the forlorn young freshman with nothing to recommend him except the fact that he was a raw country lad just as Joe's father had been a generation before.

After her return to Edgefield, as Alice was giving Edmund an account of her visit, she chanced to speak of Dr. Baker.

"You don't mean that Gideon Patrick was lunching at Nancy's?" Edmund asked irritably. "If that is n't just like his cheek!"

"Why should n't he lunch there? He's an old friend of Joe's."

"I've no doubt he's clung to Joe like a bur from the day he first met him. Gideon always had an eye out for the rich and the powerful. If Joe had gone to school with him, as I did, he would have no illusions about Gideon Patrick."

Gideon Patrick Baker, in fact, had been anything but a favorite with his schoolmates. In his

earliest childhood he showed a propensity to drive a sharp bargain, and from the primary school up, his exemplary scholarship and behavior aggravated the other children, who were quick to perceive that it was due to a love of approbation and a desire for self-advancement. A bit of doggerel came into Edmund's mind; he was afraid that he had been responsible for it in those far-off days.

“Run, fellows, run, here comes Giddy,
Awful menace to the stiddy.”

Gideon Patrick Baker was the son of Delia O'Connor, a pretty girl of seventeen, fresh from Ireland, whom Mr. Baker married when his children by his first wife were women grown. The young fellow had always been ashamed of his middle name and of his Irish blood, although Delia O'Connor had brought a grace and charm, as well as a love of service and a simple sense of duty, into the country hotel, which had made it a very different place during the few years of her short life. She had died before her son entered Harvard. He often thought with what passionate interest she would have watched his college career, and how proud she would have been when he graduated “Cum laude.” His love for detail, his perseverance, and ambition served him equally well in the Medical School. Meanwhile he had bent all his powers towards gaining good manners, and like most of those who set out on

the quest, he had acquired an unnecessarily large supply.

After leaving the Medical School, Dr. G. P. Baker put out his sign in one of Boston's most fashionable streets. He meant to become a prominent physician, and hoped to marry an heiress, but he did not belong to the class who would rather starve in Boston than grow rich elsewhere, so he soon drifted away to a manufacturing town, where he had no congenial society, but plenty of work.

Edmund told Alice these facts in a picturesque form, and to his surprise she said, "It is certainly very creditable for him to have made so much of himself with such a heavy handicap."

"You don't mean that you liked the fellow?"

"I did not dislike him. I thought his manners were a little too effusive, but he seemed very amiable and kind."

"I can remember him when he was as bare of manners as the trees are of leaves. His amiability is just a veneer. He's got the fiery temper of an Irishman. The reason I can't stand him is that he does n't ring true."

But whether Gideon rang true or not there was no doubt that he was a skillful doctor and possessed an amount of tact that Edmund, who had scant patience with shams of any kind, sometimes lacked.

It was a little more than three years later when

Gideon's niece, Kate Howland, wrote and suggested his coming to Edgefield. She affirmed that there was an excellent opening for another doctor at the Mill Village, for "Ed Ware's wife" had antagonized so many of his poorer patients that they would be only too glad to go to a new man. So Dr. G. P. Baker folded his tents, and took with him his book-plate, his coat of arms, and all his hardly won signs of belonging to an old family, back to the town where every one knew that he was Gideon Patrick Baker, the son of pretty Delia O'Connor.

Dr. Baker's ingratiating manners soon won him many friends among the mill hands, and gradually, as time went on, his unvarying suavity attracted a certain proportion of the dissatisfied among Dr. Ware's influential patients. Mrs. Ingram, for instance, the wife of the most prominent lawyer in town, took offense at Dr. Ware's telling her that she would be a well woman if she stopped worrying about her nerves and did her own housework. She sent in hot haste for Dr. Baker, who sat blandly and sympathetically by her sofa, day after day, through the winter, and when spring came, tentatively suggested that perhaps if she played tennis it might help her. Mrs. Ingram's speedy cure brought Dr. Baker still more into prominence.

It was at this point in his career that he first conceived the plan of marrying one of Edmund

Ware's sisters. Nothing could be such a hallmark of invulnerable respectability as to be connected with this irreproachable family. He had not been especially attracted to the Ware girls in his early days; they were a few years older than he, and he had known them very slightly. It was not like his early dream of marrying a beautiful heiress, but it held the promise of much comfortable, middle-aged content. Perhaps, too, one of its most delightful features was the feeling that he would at last "get even" with Ed Ware.

There was a gentleness about Sophia that appealed to him, but he saw that Marcia was the leading spirit, and he made up his mind that she would make him the better wife. He began, therefore, to single her out for especial attention, and he felt that she had given him as much encouragement as he could reasonably expect. At the fair for the mill hands' night school, where Marcia had charge of the flower table, he had made up the amount of her sales from twenty-two dollars and fifty-nine cents to an even twenty-five dollars, and he had also burdened himself with seven plants, which were going to be a great nuisance to him during the transition period before he moved from his uncomfortable lodgings into his recently acquired house. Marcia's smile was all the sweeter because she was in general so grave. It could not be that she thus distinguished him

merely on account of her gratitude to him for his interest in the night school. She must have divined the delicate attention to herself.

He had given Mrs. Ware and her daughters several invitations to go to drive with him, and although Mrs. Ware had accepted only the last one and Sophia was the daughter who accompanied her, Gideon set down this circumstance to Marcia's dislike of being talked about until things were more definite.

Finally, Gideon perceived that the time had come to disclose his preference. As he walked along in the crisp October air he felt slightly nervous, but had no real anxiety as to his reception. Marcia Ware was nearly forty, and so far as he knew there had never been the faintest hint of a romance in her life. She could hardly fail to respond with gratitude to his offer, for unmarried men of his education and attainments were not to be met with in the neighborhood. She had so much ambition and executive ability that she would be glad to get away from this deserted village, and live in the centre of things in Edgefield, where her opportunities for work and pleasure would be enlarged fourfold. When he was a boy, the brick parsonage in North Edgefield where the Wares lived had been the centre of pleasant activities, but now that so many of their neighbors had moved away, or died, the house seemed to him as stranded and forlorn as drift-

wood on a beach. Gideon was pleased with this simile.

He had the good fortune to find Marcia at home, and while he was waiting for her to come down, he let his penetrating eyes wander around the room, and not one detail of its charm was lost on him. The carpet was faded and so was the paper, but he knew that if he were to try for years to make such a room in his own house, he should fail. It was the difference between Harvard University and a new Western college, he told himself. There was a subtle atmosphere that could not be duplicated to order. These women were high-bred ladies of the old school. Here she came now with her gentle tread that was so different from the noisy step of his niece Kate.

Marcia was in soft brown, and although her dress was a little faded, the white at her neck and sleeves was daintily fresh. She had never been beautiful, but the years that had turned so many of her fairer contemporaries into plain, middle-aged women had scarcely touched her. Gideon felt that after all his wanderings and restless ambitions he had found the real thing at last.

"I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting," said Marcia, "but mother has one of her bad attacks of bronchitis. I am sorry Sophia is out. She has gone to get autumn leaves to trim the church."

"Yes? I did not ask for her, I came especially to see you."

He tried to throw a certain amount of mystery and comradeship into his manner, but it was evident that he failed, for Marcia replied coldly that if she could help him in any way, she should be very glad. The tortoise-shell cat walked in at this point, but not finding things to her mind, hastily took her departure.

"What an unusually beautiful cat," said Gideon, suavely. "I am very fond of cats; they are such a decorative and cozy addition to a home."

"The cat knows I dislike her and that I don't let her come into the parlor, so she does n't stay unless mother is here," Marcia stated tartly.

For an unworthy moment Gideon found himself ranged on the side of the tortoise-shell cat. He had not realized before how much Mrs. Ware, with her ready sympathy, had increased the pleasure of his former calls.

Marcia wondered afresh what had made the son of Gideon and Delia Baker take up this tiresome habit of coming to see them so often. It was less than a fortnight since his last call.

"You know I have hired the house with the white columns near the Mill Village," said Gideon, plunging in boldly, "and as I was sitting here I thought how impossible it would be for me alone ever to make it look like this house. Every home needs a woman's touch."

According to his carefully prepared schedule she should have replied, "Yes, a man knows very little about making a home;" but what she really said, was: "I don't know about that. Some of the pleasantest rooms I have ever seen have been men's rooms; my brother's college room at Dartmouth, for instance, and his own house before he was married had an especial charm."

"Yes? But a man is so lonely all by himself. The mere presence of Mrs. Ware gives a grace to Edmund's home."

Marcia had her own opinion concerning the presence of her sister-in-law in her brother's house. She was too loyal to allow her real views to be suspected and too sincere to pretend an admiration which she did not feel, so she turned the conversation.

"I should think you would look out for some nice boy who could go to school and help you in various ways," she suggested.

Gideon stroked his brown moustache to hide a smile. "I don't want a boy; what I want is the companionship of a refined and high-bred woman. I have lived at the Edgefield House and at boarding-houses all my life," he went on, casting his carefully prepared plan of attack to the four winds, "and you can't think how tired I am of it, and how I long for a home, a real home."

There was a pause, and then Marcia said stiffly,

"I don't know why you are telling me this, but if I can help you by my advice —"

"It is you I want," said Gideon, boldly.

The look of astonishment that swept over her face made him hurry on with a kind of breathless rush.

"I care more for what makes a true lady than for anything else — beauty, or charm, or grace. All my life I've been looking for the real thing, and now I've found it. If you would do me the inexpressible honor of being my wife, I'd be so grateful and so proud —" He left his sentence unfinished; it was not at all what he had meant to say, but something in the dignity of the woman before him made him suddenly alive to the fact that all the honor in the affair was to be conferred by her.

She spoke with quiet deliberation. "You have taken me entirely by surprise, Dr. Baker." I am very sorry to give you pain. It is an honor for any woman to be thought of in this way by a good man, but you must see yourself, when you stop to think about it, that what you propose would be entirely out of the question."

"Why?" Gideon felt himself reduced to the first principles of unadorned bluntness.

"For one thing, I could never leave my mother."

"But your sister could take care of her."

"And then I am older than you are," said

Marcia, casting about for every reason but the most important one.

"No one would ever think you were, and if I don't mind that, I don't know why you should."

"I could never care for you as a woman ought to care," said Marcia, congratulating herself on her moderation. She would have liked to tell him in round terms what she thought of his audacity in dreaming of marrying her.

"But in time, Miss Ware —"

"Time would make no difference."

"You cannot tell. You barely know me now. All I ask is that you will give me a chance to show you what I am. If you will only let me come to see you — and —"

"Can't you see how utterly inappropriate it would be?" said Marcia, losing her self-restraint at last. "We have had an entirely different bringing up. All our standards and our ways of looking at life have been different."

"You mean," said Gideon, stung into resentment, "that however hard I have tried to do right, whatever distinction I have attained, would count as nothing with you. You mean that I am damned by such as you, before you know me, because I am the son of Gideon and Delia Baker. I'll wish you good afternoon, Miss Ware, and I hope that you will pardon my presumption."

"It was very good of you —" Marcia began.

“You need n’t try to sugar my medicine for me,” he said with a bitter little smile, as he turned to leave the room. “I can at least take it like a man.”

As he walked away from the house he asked himself hotly why, at certain crucial points in life, he inevitably spoiled the dignified effect he intended to produce by losing his temper. He had inherited a double portion of this undesirable commodity. It was not only his pride that was hurt, but he had a cruel sense of disappointment. After long years of patient work he had saved enough money to make it prudent to marry, and side by side with a very practical and matter-of-fact view of life, there existed in his mind an unexplored amount of sentiment of which he was half ashamed, and Marcia Ware’s refusal had thrown him back once more into his crudely masculine world.

As he went by the brick church with the white belfry he saw that a buggy was drawn up in front of it, and he noticed with displeasure that Sophia Ware was getting out. He gave her as curt a nod as a man of his recently acquired manners ever permits himself, and was passing on, when he saw that the farmer’s boy who had been driving her had no idea of helping her with her load of autumn leaves. There were far more of them than she could carry, so he came forward and assisted her. She was not so good-looking as Marcia,

he reflected, and she had even less style, but there was something very friendly and grateful in her voice as she said, "Thank you, how kind you are. I have the key of the church here," she explained; "Marcia usually helps me, but mother is so wretchedly we thought we ought n't both of us to leave her."

As Gideon followed Sophia up the aisle of the church, his anger against her sister was for the moment forgotten, and he was taken back to the years of his boyhood. In his quest after respectability Gideon had worshiped in many churches, but he had never entered one that seemed so filled with the Holy Spirit as this bare old meeting-house with its high-backed pews and white gallery. There, in the front row, he used to sit with his mother, who was a Protestant from the north of Ireland.

"Thank you so much," said Sophia, as he put down the sheaf of branches on the pulpit steps. She looked very gentle and womanly, as she stood there in the afternoon light, which streamed in through the plain glass windows. It touched him to think how life had changed for her since the days of her girlhood; the large congregation who had gathered to listen to her father was scattered now, and only a handful of parishioners were left to listen to his successor, and yet here she was, still faithful to the traditions of the past, although she had to come here alone.

"Can I be of any assistance to you, Miss Sophia?" he asked.

"If you will tie up these branches for me on either side of the pulpit, I shall be so much obliged to you."

Gideon was very useful, and Sophia's thanks were so heart-felt that he found himself lingering over his task to prolong her gratitude.

"Do you know," he said, "that I have n't been inside this meeting-house since I used to come here with my mother?"

"I remember her so well," said Sophia. "I used to watch for her every Sunday. I thought she was the most beautiful woman who came into church, and I always hoped that I should know her some time. Once I met her in the road with her arms full of daisies and buttercups, and she stopped and gave me some, and I was so happy."

"You felt like that about her?" Gideon said with emotion. "I wish she could have known you. She was such a true lady in her heart, but she was shut out from the best society in Edgefield, because she was Irish by birth and had married my father. There are no people in God's universe, Miss Sophia, so narrow-minded as the people who live in a small New England town. I know the best men in Boston. I graduated fifth in my class at the Medical School, but that does n't help to make my good Edgefield

neighbors forget that I am the son of Gideon and Delia Baker."

"I am sure you are over-sensitive."

"Indeed, I am not. This very afternoon I have been made to feel my place."

"In what way?"

He hardly knew what prompted him to continue the subject, and confide in Sophia the secret of his unsuccessful wooing, but it was done by an imperative impulse. She listened with wide open eyes. The fact that her sister had received an offer of marriage turned her quiet, every-day life into an exciting romance. When he had finished, she said gently: "You must not be discouraged. Of course you took her very much by surprise."

"I don't want her now," he said sullenly. "She tried to be polite, but she treated me like the dirt beneath her feet. She told me our bringing up had been so different. I am sure she could never forget nor forgive my parentage."

"She could not feel like that. You do her an injustice. If she learned to love you, she would be proud to think that you had made so much of yourself."

"Would you feel so?"

"Every woman feels so. Once make Marcia love you and she would admire your strength of character."

"I wonder if I could make you love me?" he asked, almost under his breath.

"Me?" Sophia dropped a branch of red maple leaves in her overwhelming surprise.

When Sophia's engagement to Dr. Baker was announced, Marcia's consternation was only exceeded by that of Edmund. They both felt that Sophia had taken leave of her senses. But she was of age, and galling as her marriage was to her brother he could take no steps to prevent it. To his intense surprise and annoyance he found that his mother was on Sophia's side, and he did not even have the comfort of his wife's sympathy, for she thought it would not be a bad thing for Sophia, who was no longer very young, and who was only allowed to be the echo of Marcia at home.

"Well, I wash my hands of the whole affair," said Edmund. "If Sophia likes that sort of man, who is shoddy through and through, she's welcome to him. Marcia had more sense."

Gideon and Sophia had but sober expectations for the future. They did not feel that life was to be made over for them, but so it proved. Sophia was so altogether real, that she was a rest to Gideon; she was too simple and straightforward to detect his insincerities, but she did feel the strength of his character, and she pitied him because of his lonely youth.

And so the man who had known no home but the Edgefield tavern and a succession of dreary

boarding-houses, and the woman who had never had a chance to assert her individuality in the home of her youth, set up housekeeping in the white mansion with the tall columns, near the Mill Village, and proceeded to live a life full of conscious worth on his side, and on hers of unassuming usefulness and serene content.

CHAPTER VIII

IN TOWN AND COUNTRY

NANCY had taken a vital interest in her cousin's marriage. She had asked Sophia to come to Boston to make her a visit, and the two women had reveled in the simple preparations for the wedding.

The years had failed to bring any open evidence of the unhappiness of Nancy's marriage. Outwardly her position was a brilliant one. Joseph Bates had bought a house on Beacon Street, opposite the Public Garden, that Nancy might have a little oasis of country, with treetops, where she could watch the coming of spring and the soft falling of the winter snows. Nancy had always loved people, and during her winters in Boston she had a constantly flowing stream of them. Lonely boys, whom Joe brought to the house; solitary girls, who were studying music; artists, whose careers were more full of future hope than present promise; these and many other friendless young people mixed with the pillars of conventional society at Nancy's "Wednesdays."

At first Alice was too much absorbed in her own life to have many thoughts to spare for Nancy,

but as the years went on and her step-sister became more and more occupied by her children, while the fact that she had been denied this great wish of her heart left Alice with many lonely hours, she began to long for Nancy's ardent affection. It seemed to her that all the good gifts of life had been showered on her step-sister. The children were such darlings; there were two of them. Philip was a little spoiled, but Mildred, the older one, was a most unselfish child, and a vision of loveliness.

Nancy's social life was so rich, too, that Alice felt starved and stunted in Edgefield; yet when she contrasted Nancy's husband with her own, she felt that in this regard she herself was indeed blessed. Joe, however, made Nancy a most devoted husband; she could hardly breathe a wish before it was gratified, and it was touching to see him with his children. In the nursery the great financier, who was becoming more and more a power in the business world, was like wax in the hands of his small son.

Once, when Alice was staying in town, Nancy had a musicale and she persuaded her step-sister to sing. Alice was surprised by the enthusiasm that her voice awakened, for it had little practice now, except when she sang to Edmund.

"Nancy," she said, when the last guest had gone, "who would have thought in the old days that you would be such an important figure in

society, and 'you do these things so well. You seem to have such a deep interest in every one."

"I do have."

"Well, you certainly manage to draw the most interesting set of people around you. You can't think what a pleasure it is to me to have a taste of my old life."

Nancy was standing by the fireplace; she had walked over to the mantelpiece that her near-sighted eyes might tell the time by the French clock. Alice thought how much charm there was about the little figure in the dress of embroidered muslin and silk that gave the effect of shimmering moonlight. Nancy wore a string of pearls around her neck, where the bones were less uncompromisingly prominent than they used to be. Plain she was still; neither the art of the hairdresser nor the dressmaker could entirely disguise this fact, but if her friends had forgotten it in the days of her obscurity, they were even more sure to overlook it now, and Nancy, five years after her marriage, was one of the greatest favorites in Boston.

She turned in response to Alice's words. "I would give it all up with the greatest joy in the world if Joe and the children and I could only live in Edgefield."

"In Edgefield! My dear Nancy, you'd be bored to death in a week! You don't realize how you've changed; your old life would n't

satisfy you now, and besides, so many of your friends have died or moved away."

"But Aunt Margaret is there, and my cousins, and you, and Edmund; and the woods are there still, and the breezy hill-sides, and the pink arbutus in early spring, and in summer there is canoeing on the river. Alice, do the children still coast on double-runners down Howland's hill? I'd give anything in the world if my children could have the country bringing up I had."

"Dear Nancy, you must come to Edgefield oftener if you love it so. Come any time you feel like it without waiting to send word."

"That's very good of you, but Joe can seldom get away, and I don't like to leave him."

The result of Alice's visit was an invitation from Edmund and herself to the Bateses' to spend Christmas with them.

"Do you want to go?" Joe asked Nancy, as he flung down the letter.

"I should love to if you will come with us."

"I'll be glad to have you go and take the children, if you like, but you don't catch me staying with Edmund Ware. If he's so mighty anxious for my society, he can look me up some time when he's in the city; he knows where to find me."

"Of course I won't go without you, but I wish you could feel differently about Edmund."

"I'll feel differently just as soon as he gives

me a chance. I have n't got over his not coming to our wedding."

"Joe," she pleaded, "he is giving you a chance now."

"Little girl, I'd do a good deal for you, but I won't eat the bread of a man I dislike so much; it would n't be square."

Thus the breach widened, just as the two women hoped it was to be bridged.

It was in the following spring, when the arbutus was pink in the woods and the birds were singing their first joyous notes, that Nancy's pride and darling, her little Mildred, who had been nothing but a comfort, was laid to rest in the Edgefield cemetery beside Nancy's mother, under the sheltering pines.

A scourge of diphtheria had swept over Boston, and while Joe went to Edgefield on his sad errand, Nancy, almost beside herself with grief, was watching at the bedside of her younger child, who was ill with the same terrible disease, praying with an agony of supplication that he might be spared her.

As Alice stood with Edmund and Joseph before the little grave, there was no thought of any alienation; it seemed as if all the distinctions that men make in their blindness were laid at rest.

Joe gripped Alice's hand. "I'll never forget your goodness," he said.

Alice was the only one of the three who was

outwardly controlled, but she felt as if, in its passing, this radiant little spirit had taken with it much of the happiness of her future life.

Edmund had entirely broken down. He was thinking of Nancy, his old comrade, his little sister, who had met all the crises in her married life without any help from him.

"Edmund," said Joe, "will you go home with me and do what you can for Nancy, poor girl? She's got an idea there's no doctor like you. Philip's a self-willed youngster, and he's pretty sick; you can never tell what will happen with diphtheria. My God, if anything happened to the boy, it would kill Nancy!"

So it came to pass that Edmund Ware crossed Joseph Bates's threshold.

Joe took him up to the top of the house where the little patient was tossing about on his bed, while his mother and a trained nurse were vainly trying to quiet him. Nancy came forward eagerly as Edmund entered.

"I knew you would come," she said. "You will save him if any one can."

"Dear Nancy, I will do my best."

She was pale and heavy-eyed, and so unlike her usual cheerful self that he was suddenly brought face to face with all that she had gone through.

"Good God," he said to himself, "why do women have to suffer so?" After all, there were compensations in being childless. Then he hastily

put the thought of her pain out of his mind. It would make him miserable to dwell on it, and it would not help her. He would, he must save her boy.

In the anxious days that followed, the two households were drawn closely together. Joseph Bates was as quick to appreciate kindness as he was to resent a slight, and when Philip was well on the road to recovery, his father's joy and gratitude knew no bounds.

"I can't tell you what you have been to us," Nancy said, as she put a cold little hand into Edmund's when she bade him good-by. "You have given us back the best thing in life."

"I dare say the youngster would have got well without me." Edmund spoke brusquely to hide his feelings.

Joe stood by, awkward and silent. He followed Edmund down the steps and saw him into his cab. The last few days had made a revolution in Edmund's estimate of Joseph Bates. He had learned the tenderness and unselfishness that were in the heart of this man whom he had once scorned; and yet the two were so fundamentally different that, while they respected each other, they could find no meeting-ground, and unless they talked of Nancy, or the boy, their conversation languished.

Joseph would have liked to give Edmund a generous check in payment of his services, and

found it hard that circumstances forced him to be in his debt.

“Good-by, Edmund,” he said. “If you ever think of coming to Boston to practice, I’ll give you a thundering good recommendation, and remember, that to begin with, you’ll have one family of ‘G.P.’s.”

As the train took Edmund swiftly towards Edgefield his thoughts often turned to the little household that he had left. “You have given us back the best thing in life.” He repeated Nancy’s words more than once. Was it the presence of the boy that had brought out the tenderness in Joseph Bates? Or was it something in Nancy herself—an imperishable charm of the spirit that all who knew her must feel?

It was good to get back to Alice, and as they were talking together in the evening, he told her of his change of views in regard to Joseph Bates.

“He’s a good fellow,” he said; “but how differently two men can look at life! His one idea of doing me a good turn was suggesting that he’d help me along if I ever settled in Boston.”

Alice’s heart began to beat quickly in response to this suggestion. “Edmund, dear,” she said slowly, “I can’t help thinking there is something in what Joe proposed. I have often felt that your talents were wasted and unappreciated in this ungrateful little town. Think how many of your patients have left you for Gideon Baker; and

think how impossible it is for us to get in touch with the mill hands. They actually seem to resent my sending them broth and jelly. It surely would n't be running away from your duty to go to Boston, and you have so many friends among the doctors, that through them and Joe you would soon build up a large practice."

"I, leave Edgefield? My dear Alice, my heart is bound up in my work here. I never go to Boston that I am not thankful that I don't have to live in that smoky, dusty, windy, and altogether detestable spot."

"It is strange how differently we feel," she murmured; "now I love the very paving stones in the streets. It has always been a dream of mine that we might live there some time."

"Has it? Well, perhaps we will when I get to be an old man and my working days are over. When I am fifty and ready to retire with a fortune, I'll nurse my rheumatism and sit in a window on Beacon Street and watch you crossing your beloved paving stones."

Alice laughed with him at this fancy sketch of their future, and tried to hide from him that she was growing more and more dissatisfied with what she considered her narrow life. She felt that her best days were over and thought of herself as already middle-aged, although she was scarcely out of her twenties, and the beautiful face that she saw reflected in the glass belied

this conclusion. She could see the future years stretching on with the same unvarying monotony. Well, there had at least been granted her one of the deepest of human experiences; but although she and Edmund loved each other dearly still, the old ardor and romance of their affection sometimes seemed choked by the accumulation of petty cares and duties. If she had had children, Alice felt that her life might have been a full one, even in Edgefield. She never saw the Howlands come into church with their two sturdy little boys without a feeling of envy. They sat directly in front of her, and it seemed as if Mrs. Howland marshaled them past her in an intentionally ostentatious manner. There was an air of conscious pride about Kate as she came up the aisle. Her hat might be three winters old, but its bows and wings were always at the proper angle, for she retrimmed it every autumn. "Smart" she certainly was in both the town and country significance of the word.

"Look at me," her ample back seemed to say. "You may have more money than I, but I manage to put on a great deal more style, and I am rich in children."

Alice was greatly tried by Mrs. Howland's methods with her children. The sad-eyed Richard, a quiet and serious boy, who was afflicted with a consuming shyness, was sure to be punished by his mother for every minor offense;

while Andrew Lawrence, Jr., a gay and mischievous child, was permitted to indulge unmolested in the manners that Nature had given him, and in this case Nature had not made a successful job of it. Once Alice had seen Mrs. Howland's baby girl, Eloise, named for Andrew's mother, Louisa, left alone in the carriage while her mother was doing some shopping. This was a piece of carelessness that Alice could not forgive, even although the child was strapped securely into the seat. Alice stopped to make friends with the baby, a smiling little person with tight red curls and a rosebud mouth. As Kate came out of the milliner's she saw Alice bending over Eloise.

"Good morning, Mrs. Howland," she said; "I was making friends with your charming little girl. Do you think it is quite safe to leave her in the carriage?"

"If I had n't thought so, I should n't have left her," Kate retorted tartly, as the memory of various other encounters with Mrs. Ware came into her mind. "Old Bess is as steady as time," she added, more gently.

"Yes, I know; but the best horse sometimes gets frightened. If anything should happen, you never would forgive yourself."

"I have had three babies, and nothing ever has happened. I hope Ed is well?" and she crisply accented the nickname that she knew Alice detested.

"Yes, thank you, Dr. Ware is very well."

Alice found it hard to reconcile the facts of this world. Why was she childless, when she would have brought up a family according to the best New England traditions, while Mrs. Howland, without high standards and with no idea of discipline, was the happy mother of two sturdy boys and this charming baby girl?

Alice had begun by having a half-superior sense of pity for Nancy and Sophia in their marriages, but she looked upon them now with a kind of envy; for Nancy was absorbed with Philip, while Sophia was in a state of beatific rapture over her six months' old Delia.

And then, a year later, came that wonderful miracle that made Alice's life over and gave the promise of a future far richer than the happiest days of her past. As she looked at the face of her sleeping baby, the little Margaret, named for Edmund's mother, the life in Edgefield, that a year ago she had found so monotonous, became absorbingly interesting. Alice felt that a more beguiling creature had never been sent to this unsatisfactory world. She was sure that in many ways her little daughter was to be like Edmund. Margaret had her father's wavy, yellow hair, and his eyes and mouth. It was evident, too, that she would inherit his thorough enjoyment of life. Her mother could not but hope that her interest in people would not be

quite so great; for to Alice, who concentrated her affections on few objects, Edmund's discursive interest in all humanity was a trying feature in his character. When Alice saw him stooping over the cradle of his child, or catching her up in his arms, she realized how incomplete his life must have seemed to him in spite of her devotion. Instead of going out of the house to his patients, after breakfast, he lingered with the child, and the moment he came in at the front door, he made a dash for the nursery.

As Alice pressed her baby close to her heart she sent her thoughts forward into the future. Margaret was not to be shut out because of her parents' absorption in each other, but the centre around which their plans revolved; and later, when she grew to womanhood, there should be no divided life for her. She should marry a man no less charming than Edmund, but he should be able to give her the position in life for which she was born. The child slept on, in rosy unconsciousness of her mother's plans, clinging to the rubber doll with a squeak to it, that she persistently refused to have exchanged for an ivory rattle. If this excellent trait of loyalty to old friends was to be hers through life, Alice felt that she must exercise especial care in the choice of them.

Darling little Margaret! Happily it would be many years before she would be a woman!

CHAPTER IX

THE YOUNGEST WARE OF EDGEFIELD

MARGARET was going to spend a week with her grandmother Ware and her aunt Marcia. It was the first time in the eight long years of her short life that she had ever been to stay in the brick house behind the poplars, without either her father or her mother. Alice had been putting off this first visit from year to year. She could not bear to have her little daughter out of her sight, and she dreaded the time when other influences must come into the child's life. She knew Edmund's mother well enough to feel sure that she would spoil Margaret, while his sister Marcia, on the other hand, would be too strict a disciplinarian; but the time had come when her old excuses no longer held, for Margaret, having weathered the storm and stress of early childhood, at eight years old was the picture of rosy health.

"Oh, my darling," Alice cried, as she clasped the child to her heart when she bade her good-by, "we have never been separated for a single night."

"Dearest mother, I wish you were coming too," and Margaret threw her arms around her mother's neck.

But although her wish was sincere, Margaret could not feel that the parting was a sad one, because she was too eager to see her darling aunt Nancy, her beloved uncle Joe, and her dear cousin Philip, all of whom were spending a few days at the brick house.

“Dear child, I hope you will have a good time. Are n’t you going to miss me a little?”

Margaret turned to throw her mother a kiss. “But if I should miss you, mother, it would spoil my good time.”

“How like her father that is,” Alice thought with a little pang.

“Well, if you should be homesick, but I don’t suppose you will be, remember you need n’t stay the whole week. You are to write me a line every day.”

Margaret made up a little face at this; writing was as yet too hardly acquired an art to be a pleasant one.

“Just a little line, dearest, to tell me if you are happy and a good girl. You need only say, ‘Dear Mother, I am having a good time;’ and then if you are not happy, you can say, ‘Dear Mother, I want to come home,’ and your father and I will drive over and bring you back.”

“Yes, mother, I’ll remember. Where’s Gertrude? Oh, here she is,” and she seized a battered-looking doll.

“Oh, don’t take that old doll, Peggy; run up and get Muriel.”

“But she went last time, it’s Gertrude’s turn. Mother, be sure you let Fluffenuff get into your lap if he wants to; he’s used to such a lot of petting, and somebody must pull up the weeds in my garden.”

“Oh, little Peggy, I am afraid you have n’t been doing your duty.”

“Yes, mother, Delia and I weeded it all over one day this week, but it’s such a very weedy garden. Delia’s is a lot better than mine, but p’r’aps it’s partly because Uncle Giddy makes her weed it every morning.”

“Margaret, I wish you could break yourself of the habit of calling your uncle by that dreadful nickname.”

“But, mother, he does n’t mind; he just laughs when I call him that. I can’t call him Uncle Gideon Patrick, now can I, mother?”

“You could call him Uncle Gideon.”

“But, mother, that sounds so like gridiron.”

“Peggy, are you never coming?” called her father, who had been waiting for some minutes in the buggy at the gate.

Once more Margaret gave her mother a tempestuous embrace, then she ran with flying feet and flying yellow hair down the brick walk between the rows of tall white summer lilies. Her mother watched the little figure in the blue

gingham frock, as she went with a hop and a skip down the walk, with the battered doll clasped in her arms. Then Alice went back into the lonely house.

As Margaret and her father drove through the main street of the town between a flourishing row of elms—for it was in the good old days when the elm beetle was unknown—the little girl glanced from one side of the road to the other, waving a good-by to every one she saw.

“Good-by, Doris; good-by, Fanny,” she called out to the elaborately dressed Ingram children at the window of a large stone house. “Good-by, Michael,” and her greeting was just as friendly to the man who was mowing the lawn. “Good-by, Jonquil,” she said to a lazy-looking yellow cat, who was sunning himself on the steps of a smaller house. “Father, the Murrays have got some new parlor curtains! Are n’t they pretty? Oh, there comes Deacon Murray,” she added, as a white-haired old man crept slowly along the street. “Good-by, Deacon Murray.” The deacon was more responsive than any one else had been.

“Why, where are you going?” he asked.

“I am going to spend a week with my grandmother,” she announced with importance.

“Well, I’ll have to get along as well as I can while you are gone,” he said with a twinkle in his eye; “but it will seem lonesome not to see any little girl passing the house.”

After they had driven a little more than a mile, they came to the mill village where the road divided. Just before this division stood a large, white house with tall columns. This was where Edmund's brother-in-law lived. Peggy's cousin Delia, a dark-haired, brown-eyed, little girl, with as grave an aspect as hers was joyous, came out on the upper piazza and waved her a good-by. Behind her were Aunt Sophia and Uncle Giddy, who, in a sombre, but faultlessly cut suit of dark gray cheviot, and with serious brown eyes, and a general air of mild prosperity and conscious virtue, certainly did not seem in accord with his frivolous nickname.

"Good-by, Delia; good-by, Aunt Sophia; good-by, Uncle Giddy; good-by, everybody; I wish you were all coming too."

"I'm afraid the house would n't hold us all," said Uncle Giddy. "Give my love to your grandmother and my warm regards to every one else." Uncle Gideon never failed to send the correctly shaded message.

"Give a great deal of love to mother and Marcia," said Aunt Sophia to her brother.

Margaret experienced a slight chill at the mention of Aunt Marcia's name. She wished she were more like Aunt Sophia, and when she said so to her father as they were driving away, he told her that her aunts used to look as much alike as two peas in a pod.

“Really, father? Then how came they to get so different?”

“I expect it’s matrimony, Peggy. Oh, you don’t know what that means? It’s being married to your uncle Giddy that’s made the difference. He’s not the one I should have chosen to keep house with,” and her father gave the little whimsical laugh that Peggy knew so well, “and your aunt Marcia did n’t want him, either; he asked her first.”

He reflected that this was a very unwise thing to have told Peggy, but she seemed as formed for confidences as Nancy was in the old days. He had moments of forgetting that Peggy was only eight years old.

She looked thoughtful, and after a time she said, “If Aunt Marcia had married Uncle Giddy, would she have got sweet and dear like Aunt Sophia? And what would have happened to Delia? Would she have been just the same if Aunt Marcia had been her mother? Or would she have stayed up in the sky and another little girl have come down?”

“I am sure I don’t know, Peggy.”

“I think Aunt Sophia is lovely, she’s so rosy and plump and she’s such a nice, cozy mother.”

“Yes, I had no idea until your aunt Sophia married, how different they really were, for Marcia was the stronger character and she set the pace.”

After passing Dr. Baker’s house they turned

to the right. In the triangle between the roads stood the mills; the unsightly brick walls had always been an eyesore to Alice. She had lived in Edgefield some time before she had thought to ask what they made in the mills. Peggy had always known, and if she happened to pass by at the end of the afternoon, the men and women who came out of the buildings interested her greatly. Some of them had foreign faces and talked in a language that she could not understand. They lived in small houses near the mills, and she saw a swarm of attractive little girls and boys playing by the side of the road. Peggy wished she knew them. If only her mother would let her go to the public school, she would have a chance to make many new friends.

“Father, don’t you think I’m old enough to go to the primary school?” she asked.

This was a sore subject with Dr. Ware, for it was one on which he and his wife held opposite views. He felt that it would be an excellent thing for Margaret to go to the district school, and that its disadvantages were not nearly so serious as those which attended her being taught at home. Alice, however, would not listen to the idea of her little girl being brought in contact with a set of children whom she would meet on equal terms in the public school.

“I am afraid you are not quite old enough, Peggy,” he said.

"But Delia's going next autumn, father, and it will be so stupid to have lessons all by myself."

"Delia is a year and a half older than you are."

"Oh, father," said Margaret, whose mind was easily distracted from the subject at hand, "look at that poor woman with the heavy bundle of clothes! Let's take her in and give her a lift."

The woman, in a faded blue calico gown clinging limply around her slight figure, had come out of the back door of a larger house where the foreman of the cotton mill lived.

"Why, it's Maria," Margaret cried with delight, as they came nearer. "Oh, Maria! I'm so glad to see you. Stop, father, and let her get in."

The woman hesitated. She had a listless air and her dress was not any too fresh, while strands of her light hair were slipping out of the loose coil at the back of her head. Although her face was somewhat freckled and sunburned, her complexion did not give the impression of health. When Margaret spoke to her, a look of strong affection brightened her face.

"I guess I'd better walk," she said, glancing humbly at Dr. Ware; "it is n't far to where I turn off."

"We'll take you all the way home, won't we, father? We've got lots of time."

Now Maria Leggett was the last person whom the doctor would have chosen to take anywhere. She had been a faithful servant to them for five

years. No one else had stayed so long, and, if the kitchen had not been kept immaculately neat, this had not interfered with the excellence of the food; but just because she had served them so faithfully the manner of her leaving had shown an excess of ingratitude that Dr. Ware, for one, could never forgive.

When he saw that she was, in the country phrase, "keeping company" with Gus Leggett, he felt it his duty to tell her how thoroughly shiftless and worthless the young fellow was; and when, in spite of this warning, he found Gus Leggett in the kitchen one evening in anything but a sober condition, he told Maria that while she was welcome to see her friends at his house as often as she liked when they were themselves, he could not have any drinking men around the place. Maria cried a little and said, "Yes, Dr. Ware," which at once softened his heart towards her, and as time went on and Gus Leggett was seen no more in their kitchen, he congratulated himself on the wisdom of his course.

The awakening had been all the harder, for Maria slipped away without even bidding them good-by, sending a woman to get the breakfast whom they occasionally employed when there was extra work in the house. When the woman was questioned, she said that she "guessed Maria had got married to Gus Leggett the night before, and did n't like to tell them because she knew they

would not approve." In the years that had passed since then, Maria had had abundant opportunity to find out the truth of Dr. Ware's words. She looked so forlorn and dejected that he felt sorry for her, but not so sorry as if she had not treated them in that shabby way. Dr. Ware could never forgive until he had forgotten.

"Get in, Maria," he said, leaning down to take the bundle in the red-and-yellow plaid handkerchief. "Move along, Peggy. Maria, I hope the children are well." He did not think it necessary to inquire for the health of her husband.

When they came to the cross-road, Maria was very anxious that the doctor should not go out of his way to take her any farther, but Peggy was insistent.

"I want to see the new baby," she said.

For the first time in her life Maria hoped that her husband would be at the Edgefield House, for Dr. Ware always contrived to make Gus so angry. When they drove down the steeply sloping hill to the hollow where the Leggetts' house stood, Maria saw her husband sitting in his shirt-sleeves on the doorstep with the two older children. The doctor got out of the buggy, and, remembering that their last interview had been a stormy one, held out his hand pleasantly to Gus, who did not appear to see it; his chin was in the air and he was gazing at the distant East Mountain.

"Come, Gus," said Dr. Ware, "I guess if I am able to forget the past, you can."

"I don't know as I feel any call to shake hands with the man who told the girl I was goin' with I was a lazy, good-for-nothin' feller."

"Well, if you are steady and working hard now, I am very glad to hear it. We 'll let bygones be bygones."

"You thought I wa'n't the marryin' kind; that I jest liked a warm kitchen to set in, and good grub, but I fooled you that time, Doc," and Gus looked at his wife and his two little girls with an expansive smile. "You don't know so much about people as you think you do. You never do like the men-folks the women in your house marry."

While the audacity of this speech irritated Dr. Ware, it also appealed to his sense of humor.

"Well, my words did n't have much effect," and he glanced at Maria, who was smoothing her oldest child's tousled yellow hair. "What a pretty little girl. What is her name?" he asked suavely.

Maria hesitated. "Margaret," she replied in a low tone.

"Margaret!" Dr. Ware did not know how completely his voice betrayed his surprise and vexation.

"I guess the alphabet is free to us if we air poor," said Gus, "and we can choose our own

names without consultin' nobody. Margaret's my wife's mother's name."

"Indeed!" Dr. Ware exclaimed a little blankly.

Maria looked up, about to protest, but thought better of it. Her mother's name was Mary Elizabeth.

"And what is this child's name?" the doctor inquired.

"Celestine."

He breathed a sigh of relief. He had been afraid of hearing that she was called Alice after Maria's grandmother.

"Maria, I want to see the baby," pleaded Margaret.

Maria took the little girl into the house and Margaret went into ecstasies over the fair-haired little creature sleeping in her old-fashioned cradle. The kitchen was a very different place from what it had been in the older Mrs. Leggett's day, although even now it was not so neat as the Wares' kitchen. Some brown loaves on a shelf of the dresser looked very appetizing, and there was something in the oven that had a delicious smell.

"Oh, Maria, what have you got in the stove? Is n't it most done, and can't I have some of it?" Peggy asked.

"It's gingerbread, and I guess it's done now, and you can have some."

Outside, the voices of the two men were get-

ting on a higher and higher key. Maria hastily turned her loaf of gingerbread out on a plate, cut it in squares, and gave Peggy a piece, telling her to take the rest of it to her father and Gus. Maria followed with a pitcher of milk and some tumblers.

As Dr. Ware and Margaret drove away, Gus remarked, as soon as they were out of hearing, "If that ain't the most nosy, interferin' cuss. Why did he come spyin' round here? I guess I've got a right to keep my place the way I want to. Hens! I don't want no advice about keepin' hens. If I choose to have them grubbin' round the door-yard, it's my own affair. I don't want no information about any new fangled hencoops. I never have got over his gettin' the Board of Health to make me drain my pond."

"It's a very good thing that it was drained," retorted Maria. "I guess you would n't have got me to come and live here, with that marshy pond near by, all covered with green scum."

"My mother lived to a good old age in spite of it. My p'int is, that when a thing's yourn, there ain't nobody got any call to interfere with you. Well, I'm glad Gid Baker come in time to be a comfort to mother in her last days; he's always so pleasant; and he seems kinder interested in all the children same as if he was a relative. Ed Ware met me in a big snowstorm

once goin' for him, and he was headed for Kate Marchant's weddin' and did n't want to stop to see poor folks. 'Is your mother really ill?' he asked, in that tony voice of his that always riles me. As if I 'd be walkin' near two miles in a big snowstorm if she wa'n't. I never could git over that. And after he got inside he suggested sendin' mother to the poor farm for the winter! when we 've always owned our own place. By Golly! when I git thinkin' about them things, it makes me so mad, it seems as if I 'd like to take a horsewhip and jest give Ed Ware a thrashin' right in the middle of Main Street."

"If you did, you 'd be taken up; you would n't have a person on your side. Dr. Ware was always a kind friend to me and many others. It 's just his manner you don't like. He 's got a real kind heart."

"Has he? Well, he keeps it mighty well hidden when I 'm around, but he never hides his manner. He has a way of tellin' you he thinks you 're a damn fool without opening his head."

Down the road Peggy was saying to her father: "What lovely children Maria has! The baby is named Viola Mary. Is n't that a pretty name? She said the Mary part of it was for her mother. Do you suppose her mother's name is Mary Margaret, or Margaret Mary?"

"I could n't tell you, Peggy."

"Father, what did Gus mean by saying you

did n't like the men the women in your family married? You love dear Uncle Joe, don't you?"

"We 've grown to be very good friends, but I was so fond of your aunt Nancy I did n't feel that any one could be quite good enough for her."

Peggy looked thoughtful. Finally she said, "I suppose, father, when I 'm old enough to get married, you won't think there is anybody good enough for me."

"I 'm sure there won't be. I hope my little girl will never marry any one."

"But, father, I don't want to be an old maid like Aunt Marcia."

"My dear, if Aunt Marcia had been the one to marry, she would have stayed exactly the same, and if Aunt Sophia had been left with your grandmother, she would have grown sweet and lovable, for she has the mother heart."

"But she would n't have had any Delia."

"No."

"Well, father, I 'm going to get married, because I want to have a lot of fluffy-haired babies like Maria's."

"I 'm afraid you 'll find them a good deal of trouble and care."

"No, I 'll make the bigger ones take care of the littler ones. There 'll always be somebody for them to play with. I 'll have more boys than girls, but quite a lot of girls, too."

She proceeded to describe them so graphically, that her father seemed to see an almost endless procession of chubby children vanishing into space.

"Father, did n't you like it when Aunt Sophia married Uncle Giddy?" she asked presently.

"Not at all, Peggy."

"Then Gus was right in what he said. But you like Uncle Giddy now, don't you, father?"

"I have grown to see that your aunt Sophia did a wise thing in marrying him."

"But he is so kind and polite to every one."

They were back again on the west fork of the road, and a little ahead of them, on the left, stood the Edgefield House, a brick building with white columns, partly shaded by tall pines.

"Father, I am very thirsty. Can't we stop at the Edgefield House and get a drink of water?"

"That is n't the kind of drink that one goes to the Edgefield House for. I could n't take my little girl in there."

Peggy's eyes grew very serious. "It looks like such a nice house, father, and I have always wanted to see the inside of it."

"It is n't a nice house. It, and other hotels like it, are the plague spots in this prohibition state. Oh, you have n't the least idea what I mean, have you? It is a place where there is a great deal of drinking and gambling."

He remembered so well having made a similar

explanation to Alice, when she once asked him if they took summer boarders at the Edgefield House. His brief answer had been enough. The mere idea of unpleasant things was to her a kind of pollution, and when they were mentioned, she metaphorically drew her skirts about her and looked the other way; but it was different with Peggy.

“Father, did you ever go to the Edgefield House?” she asked.

“Yes, I went there a good deal at one time, when I was a young man.”

“And that ’s how you know it ’s so bad?”

“Yes.”

There was nothing in Dr. Ware’s past which he minded telling his child, although a great deal that he preferred to keep from his wife; who could not have understood his crude youth. If he had gone to the Edgefield House, it was purely for the love of sociability. He had had a consuming desire to see life, and having seen it, he had been so revolted by the grosser side of it that he had turned sharply away with disgust.

“I suppose you did n’t know it was bad when you went there?” Peggy said.

“Oh, I guess I knew well enough what it was like. There is a great deal of good in most bad things as well as some bad in most good things. The house was much better than it is now, and old Mr. Baker, Delia’s grandfather, who kept it

then, was in his prime. He was an excellent host, telling the most racy stories. His grandson took me there; he and I were great chums. Your uncle Gideon had gone out into the world to seek his fortune. He was always a sober, steady chap, bent on getting on, but the other one," his face softened, "Jim Marchant, was as brilliant and lovable a young fellow as I have ever seen."

"Marchant, Jim Marchant?" Peggy mused. "Marchant is the middle name of one of the boys who sits in front of us at church."

"Yes; Jim was their uncle."

Margaret's mind immediately became occupied with these children. Ever since she had met the little Howlands one Christmas at her grandmother's house, when her cousin Philip was spending his holidays there, she had longed to be allowed to play with them, but after that one rapturous occasion she had never met them again at any house. Her mother would have been surprised if she had known how much of Margaret's willingness to go to church was due to the fact that the Howland children seldom missed a Sunday. The boy with the dark eyes never looked at her — she was always hoping he would — but his younger brother never failed to give her admiring glances, while the little girl, who was not so very much older than she was, always nodded to her in a friendly way. This pleasant recognition kept her hope alive from week to week that some-

thing interesting would happen before the next Sunday.

There had been two Christmases since that blissful one, but in spite of the lapse of time, Margaret could recall every detail of it. Delia had spent the night before Christmas with her, so that they could hang up their stockings together, and the following afternoon the two little girls were driven to their grandmother Ware's. There had been a wonderful Christmas tree, Margaret's first, and there was a Noah's Ark on it for her. She had always wanted one, for the sociability of it appealed to her. It seemed so delightful to the only child that each animal had a companion exactly like himself, and that there were enough people to have a merry time during those long, rainy days. Margaret was clasping her ark with rapture when Eloise Howland came over to look at it. She let her take it with unsuspecting innocence.

"I want that," said Eloise, "and you can have my basket and my china cat, instead."

"But I don't want them," she protested. "I want my Noah's Ark."

Peggy took hold of one end of it and Eloise firmly held the other end.

"You ought to be ashamed to try to take that away from a little girl who is smaller than you are, Lou Howland," said Philip, coming to Peggy's assistance with his superior strength.

"You just stop talking to my sister like that, Philip Bates," said Lawrence Howland, taking hold of Eloise's end.

There was fierce pulling on each side, although when Margaret saw what was going to happen she let go; for she preferred to give her treasure to another to having it mutilated, but Philip had no such consideration. Richard rushed in to separate the combatants, but he was too late. He arrived just in time to find Philip staggering back with one end of the ark, while Lawrence and Eloise were clasping the other end, and Noah's family and the animals were lying in a heap on the floor. Margaret began to cry, while Richard stooped over to pick up the contents of the ark. He held up Noah and his family to her, shyly.

"Don't cry," he said, "they are all right. The ark landed on Mount Ararat; they don't need it any more, the flood's over."

"I think you are a perfectly horrid little girl, Lou Howland," Philip was saying.

"My name is n't Lou, it's Eloise," she retorted; "and I don't care anything about the old ark anyway, but I'm glad she is n't going to have it. They ought to have given me a Noah's Ark, too, instead of that silly china cat and a basket. I've got more baskets now than I know what to do with."

Peggy, meanwhile, was picking out a few of the

animals, as well as two of the people, and offering them to Eloise.

“Would you like some animals and Mr. and Mrs. Ham?” she asked. “I can’t give up any more, because I’ve never had a Noah’s Ark, but I should like you to have some of them.”

“I don’t want your old animals; I don’t want any of it unless I can have the whole of it, and it’s spoiled now.”

“Eloise, you ought to be ashamed of yourself,” said Richard. “You’ve spoiled her Noah’s Ark, and the least you can do is to be very grateful to her for wanting to give you some of the animals.”

Then came the wonderful ending to the evening, which eclipsed its stormy beginning. Richard, Lawrence, and Philip could not do enough for Margaret’s pleasure; and Eloise soon thawed out and was a merry comrade in all the games. But the Howlands were never asked again to Grandmother Ware’s, and Margaret did not know that her mother had said she did not want her little girl to be brought in contact with children who had such rough manners.

“Father,” Margaret asked, “did Jim Marchant have dark eyes or blue ones, and where is he now?”

Dr. Ware gave a start. “He is dead; he died years ago. The drink and the gambling that did n’t hurt the men with the cooler temper-

aments were too much for him, poor boy, and one night he shot himself just outside the Edgefield House. It was a terrible tragedy, and I should not have told you about it, except that you ask so many questions that you would be sure to learn very soon that there is evil in the world, and I want you to know from me how we ought only to have pity for the people who sin through weakness, and often have more good in them than those who succeed. There is a great deal of good in most people, Peggy."

"Yes, father, even in Gus Leggett."

"Gus Leggett! We were n't talking about him," said her father, shortly.

CHAPTER X

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR

“MARGARET! Margaret!”

Marcia Ware's voice, usually so low and well modulated, sounded shrilly in the July sunshine. “Margaret, it's time to get ready for dinner. Oh, where is the child?”

Marcia had been busy all the morning preserving cherries. Earlier in the day she found Margaret closeted with her grandmother; there was a pink spot in each of the old lady's cheeks and her eyes were very bright. She had been telling some of the things the little girl's father had done when he was a boy, naughty things as well as good ones, and Peggy was a thrilled and wrapt listener. The child thought she had never seen anything so beautiful as her frail old grandmother in her white dimity gown with the cobweb lace on her white hair. She seemed like a drift of belated snow that was lingering in a quiet valley, and Margaret felt that at the strong touch of the sun she would vanish entirely. The little girl listened eagerly to the stories, and then in the middle of a most exciting one, about the time that her father and Jim Marchant

disobeyed and went in a boat up the river, Aunt Marcia had come in with her mother's eggnog.

"Come, mother, it's time for your morning nap," she said.

Marcia was as exact about hours as the modern mother is when she is taking care of her baby.

"Oh, Aunt Marcia, can't she stay a little longer?" pleaded Peggy; "it is such an interesting story."

"No, she is looking very tired."

Her grandmother turned and gave Peggy an expressive glance which said as plainly as words, "To be continued in our next."

Mrs. Ware found it hard to grow old; she had not expected to feel as young as ever at seventy-five, but her strength of body was not equal to her keenness of mind, and so her daughter was always at hand to shield her from undue excitement. All the people she found most interesting were snatched away from her after a brief interview. Joseph Bates, who was an especial favorite of hers, was never allowed to stay more than twenty minutes in her room, because of his loud voice and aggressive personality; Philip and Margaret were given but a little longer time, and even her niece, Nancy, her heart's darling, had a way of disappearing before Mrs. Ware was ready to have her go.

Twice, later in the morning, Peggy made an

inroad into the kitchen, but her aunt Marcia speedily sent her out again. No, she could not have any cherries; it was not good for little girls to eat between meals. Yes, she might go out into the garden and play if she liked, if she would wear her hat and not go into the hot sun, or climb any trees, or eat anything, or pick any flowers, or tease the kitten. She must be sure not to get any grass stains on her frock, for this one would have to last, for the mornings, until she went home.

Peggy had gone out into the bright sunshine a little sadly. It was so different yesterday when her uncle and aunt and Philip were here. Dear Philip! it had been so good to see him! When he and his father had come down the road to meet them, she had climbed out of the buggy before the horse stopped, and she had run to Philip and flung her arms about his neck.

He had said, "Hullo, Peggy," and her uncle Joe had remarked, "You 'd better be properly grateful, young man. You 'll never get any one to care more for you, not even a wife."

And then the blissful four days that followed! The memory of them made Peggy hastily put the skirt of her brown linen frock to her eyes. Everything in the garden reminded her of Philip, or his father, or darling Aunt Nancy. The doves that came fluttering down recalled to her the time that they had eaten corn out of Aunt Nancy's

hand. The barn door was wide open, but it was quite too sad to go inside and see the empty stalls, where the pair of bay horses had been so short a time ago. What a happy drive she and her uncle Joe had, on that morning when Philip went fishing with Gus Leggett and the Howland boys, and it was so hot that neither of the aunts wanted to go to drive with them. Uncle Joe was so kind and dear, and told her so many interesting things, and he had spoken, as he often did, when they were alone together, of Mildred, the little cousin, who would have been just two years older than Philip was, if she had lived. The tears had come into Uncle Joe's eyes and Peggy cried with him.

"I can never talk about Mildred to your aunt Nancy, it upsets her so," he said, wiping his eyes and hers.

"You can talk about her to me, all you want to; I love to hear about her," said Peggy. Then she flung her arms about his neck and kissed him, and told him she loved him better than any one in the world except her father and mother, Delia, Philip, and Aunt Nancy, of course, and Aunt Sophia. Oh, yes, and grandmother; she loved grandmother very, very much.

He called her his little comrade, and said he loved her better than any one else, with a few exceptions.

After passing the barn Peggy came upon the

cherry-tree, and this brought back many exciting memories. She was not sure that forbidden fruit was always the sweeter, although Philip had told her so. She had been so afraid of seeing Aunt Marcia's sharp eyes at one of the windows, that she had eaten her cherries hastily and did not have the full enjoyment of their delicious flavor. The first time that Philip tempted her she thought of the Garden of Eden, only Philip was not at all like the snake, he was very handsome; she had never seen any boy so handsome as Philip. He was small of his age and had a delicate look, but she greatly admired his light, wavy hair, and his eyes fascinated her: they were a very pale blue, like his father's, and when he stood in a glare of sunshine, his pupils were so small that his eyes looked quite washed out, but in the shadow, or in the evening, the pupils grew so large that Peggy felt as if he had black eyes. Dear Philip! She had cried when he went away, and told him how she wished he could come and live with them, and be her brother, and he had replied that he liked his father and mother best, but he added condescendingly, "When I am through college and you are a grown up lady, you shall come and keep house for me."

At this she brightened visibly, although it seemed a long time to wait.

Peggy looked up into the cherry-tree longingly. Although she had been told not to climb it, she

had disobeyed so many times it would not matter if she did so once more, and there were some nice cherries at the top; the lower ones had been picked for Aunt Marcia's preserves. A maltese kitten came out of a side door and frisked along one of the garden paths. Peggy caught him up in her arms. "We 'll sit in the tree together," she said. "He 'll be some company."

She put him over her shoulder, but she had not calculated on his objections to this proceeding. He dug his claws through her frock, and she felt the prick of them on her soft skin. Then he gave one frantic leap, tearing a hole in the hamburg trimming of her sailor collar. She looked after him with consternation, fearing that he had broken one of his many legs. It must be useful at times to have so many. She saw, to her great joy, that he was dashing wildly across the lawn.

"I did n't tease the kitten," she said to herself more than once; "but if he had broken his leg, it might have seemed as if I did."

She looked ruefully at her torn trimming. "Aunt Marcia will think I am a very naughty girl," she reflected. "If I am going to be punished anyway, I might just as well eat some cherries." Then she climbed the tree, and somehow or other she managed to get some cherry stains on the ill-fated dress.

"Margaret!"

Aunt Marcia's voice was coming nearer and

nearer. If only she were short-sighted like Aunt Nancy! Aunt Marcia looked so very fresh in her clean lilac gingham that Peggy wanted to vanish into the earth.

"Why, Margaret Ware, what are you doing up in that cherry-tree? You've been eating cherries," Miss Ware added, as the stains caught her eye.

"Yes, Aunt Marcia."

"How did you tear your collar?"

"The kitten did it, Aunt Marcia."

"The kitten?"

"Well, it was n't his fault," Peggy explained, for it seemed mean to put the blame on the absent.

"So you were teasing him! That's the third way in which you disobeyed me."

"I was n't teasing him, Aunt Marcia, truly I was n't. I just thought he would like to sit in the cherry-tree with me, but he had other plans."

"Other plans! I should imagine so. Margaret Ware, don't you think you have been a very, very naughty little girl?"

"Yes, Aunt Marcia."

"Don't 'Aunt Marcia' me any more; it gets on my nerves."

"But Uncle Gideon says that is the proper way."

"I suppose your uncle Gideon told you it was

the proper thing for you to disobey your aunt, and that is why you teased the kitten, climbed the tree, and ate the cherries."

Peggy hung her head.

"How do you think a little girl ought to be punished who has been so very disobedient?"

Peggy was silent, and so was Miss Ware for a moment. Finally she said, "We are to have cherry pie for dessert to-day, but as you have eaten so many cherries already, I shall not let you have any dessert."

"Oh, please, Aunt Marcia, give me some other punishment."

"No, you are to have your dinner up in your own room, and you're not to have any cherry pie. A little girl who eats cherries between meals is very apt to be made sick, and if you were to eat more, you would surely —"

"Oh, but Aunt Marcia," she broke in, "it doesn't make me sick to eat them between meals, or any time."

"So you've tried eating them between meals before?" said keen Aunt Marcia.

Peggy hung her head again.

"Did you eat any yesterday between meals?" her inflexible aunt pursued.

"Yes, Aunt Marcia."

"And the day before yesterday?"

"Yes, Aunt Marcia."

"And the day before that?"

“Yes, Aunt Marcia.”

“I have just told you not to ‘Aunt Marcia’ me so much. It seems as if you were bent on provoking me.”

“I forgot Aunt Mar —, I forgot.”

“I suppose you ‘forgot’ when you ate the cherries. Philip probably ‘forgot’ too, for I have no doubt he ate some.”

Marcia Ware was the soul of honor, and Margaret’s silence in regard to Philip pleased her so much that she did not press the question, and would have liked to lighten her punishment, but discipline must be maintained.

“It is time for dinner now, Margaret,” she said. “You can go directly up to your room and I will bring you some. I shan’t change your dress until just before supper. You can have the afternoon to think over how very disobedient you have been and to make good resolutions. I hope that the sight of your torn trimming and the cherry stains will be a help to you.”

Peggy went up to the pleasant, old-fashioned, little room where she slept, and before long her aunt brought up her dinner, which consisted of cold beef, bread and butter, and a variety of vegetables. “I did n’t bring you any chicken broth,” Miss Ware said, “for I could n’t get anything more on this tray.”

“I’d just as lief run down and get it, Aunt Marcia.”

"No, a little girl who has been so disobedient must not expect all the delicacies of the season."

Then Miss Ware went out, turning the key on the prisoner, and presently Peggy heard the locking of the door between her small room and her aunt's large one. She had never felt so desolate in her whole life.

The hours between the one o'clock dinner and the six o'clock supper seemed an eternity. She meant to eat her dinner slowly, so that the occupation might last as long as possible, but she was so very hungry that she found herself hurrying through it.

"I wish I 'd eaten more cherries," she reflected.

Peggy looked everywhere for "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," then she remembered that she had left it in her grandmother's room. There were only a few books on the hanging shelves, and these were all in French and German. She took them out one by one, hoping to find pictures in some of them, but it was a disappointing hunt. At last she sat down by the window, and burying her face in her hands, she sobbed as if her heart would break. In all the eight years of her sunny life Margaret had never spent so much time alone. She was constantly with her beautiful darling mother; she had hardly thought about her since they parted, until now, when the memory of the tones of her sweet voice and of the look of love in her blue eyes suddenly overcame the poor child.

It seemed as if she could not live through the time until her father was to come for her on Saturday afternoon.

"Mother said I was to write to her if I was homesick," she thought.

She went over to her little trunk and took out the sheets of paper, and stamped envelopes, so carefully directed in her mother's beautiful handwriting. At the sight of it Peggy's tears fell afresh.

"I only wrote to her once," she thought remorsefully. She took out a pencil and wrote in her round, childish hand:—

"Dear Mother, I am very, *very*, VERY homesick. Please come for me at once. Your very, *very*, VERY loving Peggy."

But how was she to get the letter mailed? It was Thursday afternoon, and unless it were put in the office at once, she was afraid her father could not come for her until to-morrow. She went over to the window again. She had often wondered whether it would not be possible to climb from the roof of the shed into the apple tree. She was sure she could do it, and then, if she had the good luck not to be seen by Katie, she could run swiftly across the meadow to the road. This was one of the occasions when she wished she had four legs like the kitten.

Peggy climbed cautiously out of the window. She wished the shed did not have a peaked roof, but she got across safely, although accompanied

by a thrilling sense of peril; then she swung herself down from the branch of the apple tree. She ran swiftly across the meadow to the road, and arrived in a breathless condition at the post-office.

"Am I too late for the mail?" she asked, as she slipped her letter through the slit.

"Yes," the postmaster replied, "it's just gone."

"Oh, dear. I'm so sorry. When is the next one?"

"At six o'clock."

Alas! the letter would not get to Edgefield until after supper and her father might not go to the post-office before the next morning.

"Has your beau gone back on you?" the postmaster inquired with a kindly smile. The two children had always come for the mail together.

"He's my cousin; he's gone home."

"So this is a love letter, I suppose."

Peggy thought the postmaster was very silly.

"It's a letter to my mother," she explained with dignity.

She turned to go back to her grandmother's house when she was arrested by a thought. Why should she not walk the rest of the way home? It could not be much more than three miles. She had heard Aunt Marcia say that she could walk three miles an hour, and if her dignified

aunt could do that, a little girl like herself ought to be able to run and skip along in even less time.

She glanced up at the clock on the white belfry of the brick meeting-house that faced the common. It was only a quarter past two. How much had happened since Aunt Marcia had called her to dinner! She ought to get home soon after three o'clock; and Aunt Marcia would not know she had gone until she came to dress her for supper. It was a very hot day, but in spite of that Peggy ran and danced along the road, for she had a terrible feeling that her aunt might in some way learn of her escape and come in pursuit of her. To think that every step she was taking brought her just so much nearer to her dear, beautiful, angelic mother, and her adorable, charming father!

When she came to the guide-post beyond the village, she saw what she called "the phantom hand" pointing to "Edgefield, 3 miles." "Oh! dear, have n't I come any farther than that?" she thought.

Peggy was beginning to feel a little tired and knew it would be wiser to walk slower. She went on without any more adventures until she came to the wood. She had met few people and nobody had taken any notice of her, but now a man with a dark, foreign-looking face, who was driving in a blue cart, stopped and asked if she did not want a

lift. Her father and mother had often cautioned her against accepting any civility from strangers.

"No, thank you," she said politely; "I am just waiting for my father."

Her little heart beat very fast at the sight of the wicked-looking man, and as he drove on she gave a thankful sigh. "I wonder if mother would call that a lie," she thought. "I am expecting my father some time."

When Peggy was out of the wood and had reached the next guide-post, she was so tired that she sat down on the grass to rest. She almost wished that she had accepted the invitation of the man in the blue cart; perhaps he was not wicked, perhaps he was only a French Canadian. It seemed as if she could never reach home, but she managed to drag herself along for a quarter of a mile, and then she felt something in one of her shoes that made her limp. There must be a stone in it. She took it off and got rid of the stone, and found a hole which had not been there when her mother sent her out into the "wide, wide world." "These are 'specially bad sneakers," she thought; "they have n't lasted any time at all." The torn trimming and the stains on her frock, which she had almost forgotten, caught her eye. "Mother 'll think I 'm very untidy. I look like a beggar maid." This idea pleased her so much that she got over another quarter of a mile by impersonating the character. But not

even this excitement could make her forget how very, very tired she was, and she felt another stone in her shoe, and had the despairing feeling that since there was no way of stopping up the hole, this might happen over and over again.

She had reached another lonely stretch of road through the woods with the river dancing merrily along at her right. "I just can't go any farther," she said. She had never felt so tired, and would have been glad to see Aunt Marcia coming in pursuit of her. She was hungry and thirsty, and the thought of her aunt's delicious suppers came over her, and there was the story which her grandmother would have finished if she had only been there. She was sure her mother would think her a very naughty girl for running away; but it was now almost as far to go back as to keep on: punishment awaited her at either end. As she sat with the shoe in her hand looking down at her aching foot, a sentence from the Bible came into her mind. "The way of the transgressor is hard." Her mother had told her that the transgressor meant the evil doer.

Then she remembered her letter. Perhaps her father would start to come for her as soon as he received it. But he might not go for the evening mail. Peggy did not like the idea of spending the night out of doors like the "Babes in the Wood." Oh, she must keep on, but it did not seem as if she could take another step. Just then she heard

the creaking of wheels and the sound of a horse's hoofs. As the wagon came nearer she tried very hard to stop crying.

"What's the matter, little girl; are you lost?" some one asked.

And as she looked up, she met the eyes of Richard Howland, the boy who never looked at her in church.

"Why, it's Margaret Ware," he said.

He sprang out of the wagon and came up to her. He was a very shy, overgrown boy of fourteen. He stood before her awkwardly for a minute and then asked, "How do you happen to be so far from home?"

She poured out the whole story in a flood of half-incoherent sentences. He stooped down and put on her shoe as gently as if she had been his little sister. "You get right in with me and I'll drive you home," he said. "I'll have to stop first at the farm because mother's expecting me," and he glanced at a variety of bundles in the back of the wagon.

It was astonishing how much less tired Peggy felt when she was once in the wagon, and knew that she was safe. At the end of five minutes she was entirely happy and able to ask her companion a long string of questions. She found, among other things, that he was coming back from North Edgefield, where he had taken chickens and eggs to the market.

"Live chickens?" Peggy asked.

"No."

She reflected a minute. "But they were alive and running around the farm the way the Leggetts' chickens do?"

"Yes."

"Then somebody had to kill them; that seems terrible. Who killed them?"

"I did."

Peggy shrank away from him.

"Father is too tender-hearted, and somebody has to do it."

"Are n't you tender-hearted?"

"I don't know. I guess I have n't time to think much about it."

"Who killed the chickens when you were too small to do it?"

To her surprise the boy threw his head back and laughed heartily. He always looked so serious at church that she did not associate merriment with him.

"Gee!" he said. "If that is n't the limit. You beat Eloise all hollow, and she's quite a hand at asking questions."

"I think Eloise is so pretty."

"You think Eloise is pretty?" This seemed a new idea to him. "Her hair is too red."

"I like red hair, and hers is so curly and fuzzy. I wish she would come and play with me some time."

He was silent, and she went on. "You did n't tell me who killed the chickens when you were too small to do it."

"That is something I shall never, never tell you," he said with mock solemnity, and it immediately became the one thing that Peggy wanted to know most, but as he remained firm, she had to turn her attention to something else.

"Don't most people call Eloise, Lou?" she asked.

"Some do, but she hates the nickname."

"Philip calls her Lou, and he calls you by such a funny name, 'Birdy.'"

Richard's dark face grew darker and his nostrils dilated. "He don't dare say that to my face."

She noticed the slip in grammar, for it was one she used to make; evidently Mrs. Howland was not so particular as her mother.

"I did n't know you minded being called 'Birdy,'" she apologized. "Philip said he called you that because you were such a 'high flyer.' What did he mean?"

"That was just some of Philip's sauce. My mother used to call me her Dicky bird when I was a kid, and the boys got hold of it, and when I went to school, they called me Dicky bird and Birdy, but they did n't call me that long," he said grimly.

"What did you do to them?" Peggy asked, with dilated eyes and bated breath.

"I thrashed them."

She had a mingled sense of fear and admiration. Life must be very exciting to this big boy who killed chickens in a casual manner as if it were all in the day's work, and as a matter of course thrashed the boys who displeased him. But what kind, brown eyes he had, and how gently he had put on her shoe!

"I've got a nickname, and I don't mind," she confided to him. "All the people I like best call me Peggy." She paused and looked up half shyly. "You can call me Peggy, if you like," she said.

He declined this flattering invitation. "I don't like nicknames," he replied; "I shall call you Margaret. It is a much better name."

Richard was usually a silent boy, but this afternoon he found it easy to talk. His own life seemed so sordid and commonplace in its outer aspect that he was surprised that even a child should find it interesting. He told her about the cows, and the sheep and lambs, and the trout brook, and finally, getting past the shell of his life to what he cared for most, she learned that he wanted to be a doctor some day like his uncle Gideon. Dr. Baker had let him glance through some of his books, but they were all too valuable to be borrowed. He told of the large attic room

he shared with his brother, where he used to sit up evening after evening, reading by the light of a candle that he bought with some of the hen money his mother gave him. Margaret learned that he had read the Bible through, and all of Shakespeare's plays once, and some of them many times.

When they reached the Howland farm with its red, rambling buildings outlined against the steep slope of the hill, Peggy had the stimulating feeling that interesting events were about to happen. Mrs. Howland came out on the porch that was shaded by a grape-vine, and asked Richard what had kept him so long; then she caught sight of Peggy.

"Where did you pick up that child?" she inquired.

Peggy looked so humble and abject while Richard was telling his story that Kate's heart instantly softened.

"I'm glad you came, Richard, for you can bring down my trunk and take me to the station. Your father is harnessing now, but he's very busy, and will be glad to be let off. Grandfather is ill again and he has sent for me."

Peggy was surprised at the expression on the boy's face.

"Gee!" he said. "Is he really sick?"

"I don't know. He's had one of his spells, but whether it is serious, or whether he's just

bored and wants me to chirk him up a bit, I can't tell you."

"I'd never go in the world if it was me; it's the fourth time he's sent for you in the last year."

"Well, if I had to live with Aunt Sarah, I'm sure I'd get bored. When there is the least thing the matter with him she's like a weeping willow. I don't grudge the old gentleman a little variety, so long as he pays my traveling expenses, but he ought to leave me something handsome in his will. I won't stay long, if he's all right. He's awfully good fun for a little while, but it's like living on olives and cayenne pepper. Two can play at the game of getting bored, and when he bores me too much, I'll have a sudden call home." She was pinning on her hat and veil while she was speaking. "Did you get me the De Long hooks and eyes?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes."

She tore open a small package to make sure.

"You did n't. You stupid boy! You are almost as bad as your father. These are just plain hooks and eyes without the hump. Peggy, you must be hungry; go in and get Eloise to give you some doughnuts and milk, while Richard is bringing down my trunk," and then as Eloise appeared, she added, "Gracious goodness, child! what have you been doing? Your hair looks like a hoorah's nest. Run and get me a comb, I have n't got to

go for twenty minutes," but Eloise had gone off in pursuit of doughnuts and milk.

"Richard, you must see that Eloise's hair is done twice a day. Mrs. Hart has promised to come to stay till I get back."

It was a greatly refreshed Peggy who sat between Mrs. Howland and Richard on the way home. They stopped at Dr. Baker's to ask him if he had received any news from his father. He came out on the piazza, and looked trim and unflurried.

"I fancy it is nothing serious, or Sarah would have sent for me," he said, "but if anything should develop, just telegraph. Why, Margaret, I did n't see you at first; everybody is up in arms about you. Your aunt Marcia has been telephoning, and your father has started to find you. I'll just step in and telephone to your mother, and let her know that you are all right."

"Don't bother to do that; we'll be there in ten minutes," Kate said.

"I cannot bear to leave her in suspense for an unnecessary moment," said Gideon.

Ten minutes later a very shame-faced little girl was pressed close in her mother's arms.

"My darling, my darling," Alice cried.

The way of the transgressor might be hard, but the way to the heart of the transgressor's mother was swift and easy.

CHAPTER XI

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

MARGARET'S father felt that some notice should be taken of the Howlands' kindness to his little girl, and as soon as Mrs. Howland came back from her visit to her grandfather at Concord, he urged his wife to go with him to call on her. But when Alice had made up her mind that a certain course of action was right, it was almost impossible to move her. After a short argument she said, "I hoped I had made you see my point of view before this. I think the Howland children are very undesirable acquaintances for Peggy. If I were to call on their mother now, she is just the sort of woman who would follow it up with a renewed attempt at intimacy."

"Oh, she's got too much good sense for that; she knows that you and she could never be friends. I do wish you'd go there with me this afternoon."

"I can't do it, because I'm so sure it would be neither wise nor right."

"A New England conscience must be very convenient at times," he retorted. "Now, I got

my conscience entirely from my Southern ancestors."

She was hurt by this remark. Edmund often said things of this kind to other people, and on these occasions Alice merely thought how amusing he was, but he seldom spoke in this way to her, and so she was sure that he was in earnest. She could not bear to vex him.

"Edmund," she said hastily, as he was about to leave the room, "I agree with you entirely in thinking we ought to do something for Mrs. Howland. Suppose you go to see them and take them some of our cherries? Or do they have cherry trees on the farm?"

"No, they have every other kind of fruit tree, but no cherries. That is a good idea."

Dr. Ware would have liked to take his little daughter with him on his drive to the Howland farm, but here again Alice was firm, so he left Peggy at her aunt Sophia's to play with Delia and pursued his solitary way. The basket of cherries was a generous one, and as he knew how fond Kate was of all sorts of preserves, his heart glowed with the pleasant sense of being able to confer a benefit.

When he reached the farm, a pale, little girl with a curly crop of red hair came to the door and told him that her mother and father were not at home. He took out the basket and, leaving it on the porch, gave his message.

Eloise assumed the part of hostess very prettily, and asked him if he would not come in and wait until her mother and father came back.

"How much you look like your mother," Dr. Ware said.

He had an excellent pictorial memory, and the low, spreading, red farmhouse with the green hill rising behind it, but perhaps most of all the swiftly flowing brook, suddenly carried him back to the days of his boyhood.

"Your mother was the prettiest girl in the whole county," he told Eloise, and then he drove away, as two patients in outlying farms must be visited.

After he reached the main road again and was about to stop at one of the farmhouses, he met Kate and Andrew.

"I'm so sorry to have missed you," he called out genially. "I've just left some cherries for you. We had an over-abundant supply this year, and my wife thought you would like some."

Kate had reached that point when the mere mention of Mrs. Ware was enough to fan her smoldering irritation against her into flame, and as they were driving home, she gave the long-suffering Andrew a recapitulation of her many causes for detesting "Ed's wife."

"I suppose her Boston conscience would n't allow her to call on me," she said, "but she felt

she'd got to pay me in some way for giving Margaret doughnuts and milk. Ed took mighty good care to let me know they had more cherries than they wanted. I'll send back every cherry. I'm not one that's going to be pauperized by any Diet Kitchen."

"Now, Kitty, Kitty, you mustn't feel like that; they meant it kindly." But although Andrew said "Kitty, Kitty," at intervals all the way home, he did not succeed in smoothing the ruffled feelings of his wife.

When they reached the farmhouse, Kate saw that her three children were gathered about the basket of cherries like flies around a honey pot.

"Don't you dare to eat another cherry," she said angrily.

Eloise and Lawrence each seized a handful and fled. Now that their mother had grown so heavy and short-breathed, there was no fear of immediate pursuit.

"I don't know what I've done that the Lord should give me such disobedient children," she remarked.

Mr. Howland had hastily retreated to the barn.

"Richard," said his mother, decisively, "you drive straight back to Mrs. Ware with those cherries, and tell her that as I have all I want she had better give them to some one who really

needs them. I feel it is wrong to keep them. If I have n't a Boston conscience, I 've a New England one."

"But, mother," Richard protested, "we have n't any cherries. You don't expect me to lie to her?"

"I expect you to repeat my exact language. You don't know but what I have bought a bushel of them. I may have twenty jars of preserved cherries down cellar, for all you know."

Richard was as truthful as his father, but he had inherited his mother's sense of humor, and as he put the basket into the wagon, he gave a low chuckle. "Gee!" he exclaimed.

"Mind you are to give the message to Mrs. Ware herself," his mother called after him.

For several years Richard had been cherishing a secret admiration for the beautiful lady who sat behind him in church, and although his errand was not in all respects what he could have wished, his blood was tingling with excitement at the possibility of seeing Mrs. Ware in her own house.

Alice had been alone all the afternoon, brooding over her husband's words. She was wondering if she ought to have forsaken her principles and gone with him, and when she heard that Richard Howland wanted to see her, she felt that she had been given a chance to atone for her over-scrupulousness.

“Show him into the parlor,” she said, “and tell him that I will be down directly.”

Richard was standing near the door when she came in. He had been examining the pictures in a kind of dumb wonder. This quiet room seemed to him as beautiful as a shrine. He gave a wistful sigh of envy as he looked at the well-filled bookshelves, and then his beautiful lady came, and greeted him most graciously.

“I’m so glad to have a chance to thank you for your goodness to my little girl,” she said.

“That’s all right,” he answered jerkily.

He had meant to say that no one could help being good to such a charming child, but the source of language seemed dried up. He felt that Mrs. Ware would think that he had the manners of a boor, but for the life of him he could think of nothing else to say. He tried to gather courage to give his message. He knew it would hurt her and he felt an impetuous desire to protect her. He wondered why she looked so sad; she seemed like one of the heroines of a Shakespeare tragedy, and yet she must be happy. How beautiful her smooth black hair was, and her pale, oval face, but her blue eyes were the most beautiful of all!

“Mother asked me to tell you that she had all the cherries she wanted so she did n’t feel it was right to keep yours, and she got me to bring them back because she thought you would like to give

them to some one else. It was so kind of you to send them, so very kind."

Kate's message softened by Richard's amendment seemed shorn of all its ungraciousness when given in his young voice.

"It was very good of your mother to take the trouble to send them back."

Alice was not sure whether an insult had been intended, or whether it was a case of conscience. The boy interested her and she was glad to have her thoughts taken from herself. It was not a simple matter to set him at his ease, and for this reason Alice found the task a stimulating one. She succeeded at last in drawing him out on the subject of his love of reading, and then an inspiration came to her. She could not offer to lend him books because the returning of them might lead to an undesirable friendship between Peggy and himself, but she could give him some volume of which she had a duplicate. They had been talking of English history, and she said, "Peggy and I have been brought up on Dickens's 'Child's History of England.' They say it is n't wholly accurate, but it is so graphic that I used to feel as if all the kings had been my intimate friends. I wonder if you would like my old copy? Your uncle Gideon gave me a new one last Christmas."

Richard's face glowed with pleasure, and then Mrs. Ware went to a bookcase upstairs that held the shabby, well-loved books of her girlhood, and

took out the "Child's History of England." Beside it was the neat, new volume, as well bound as Gideon was himself. The older book was very dilapidated, but it brought up so many memories that she found she could not give it away; for Peggy's earnest little face had bent over it, and Peggy's eager little hands had turned the leaves. She came down, bringing the new copy.

"I don't know as you can understand me," she said, "but it seems as if a kind of personality clung to old books, and so much of my own history is bound up in the loose covers of my old 'History of England,' that I am going to keep it. I'll give you the new one, and by and by your history will be bound up with that."

She opened the book and Richard saw that on the fly leaf his uncle Gideon had written, "Alice Lancaster Ware, with the regards of her brother-in-law, G. P. Baker."

"Your uncle said that as Delia had helped to wear out my copy, he was going to give me 'new lamps for old,' but new lamps are never the same."

In order that his mother might know that the book was lawfully acquired, she wrote, "Richard Marchant Howland, from his sincere well-wisher, A. L. Ware," with the date.

Richard managed to smuggle his gift into the house, and he put it behind the other volumes

in the little bookcase he had made for himself in the attic room that he shared with his brother. The stolen half hours that passed with the "History of England" were more exciting to him than if they had been stolen interviews with a maiden. He was sure his mother would not think to look behind his other books until house-cleaning time, and before that he could devise some other hiding place for his treasure. But he had not reckoned on the unexpectedness of his mother's character, for one day when she was putting the attic room in order, she noticed how dusty the books were, and then and there, she decided to give the boys' room a thorough cleaning. When she discovered a volume in hiding behind the others, she was sure that Richard had some improper book that he was ashamed to have his mother see, and the fact that he had begun to have secrets from her sent the angry color into her face. Kate pulled the book out with trembling fingers, wondering what blood-curdling tale her boy was reading. The "Child's History of England" met her astonished eyes. It was bound so well that she had a moment's unworthy suspicion. Could it be possible that her boy's mad craze for reading had prompted him to take this book without leave out of some one's house? Unless there were such an explanation for his conduct, why should he secrete this harmless book so carefully? Yes, it must be so, for there was a name written on

the fly leaf. Kate could not read very well without her glasses, but she managed to make out the inscription. There was the date written in Mrs. Ware's clear hand! Yes, she had given it to him on that July afternoon when he had taken back the cherries; for several months he had concealed this book from his mother.

Kate ran downstairs in a blind fury in search of her boy, with the book in her hand. To think that Richard, her trustworthy, steady Richard, should have gone so contrary to her expressed wish as to receive a gift from the hand of her enemy! She almost ran into him in the narrow, second-story entry, as he was on his way upstairs.

"How dared you accept this book from Mrs. Ware?" she hissed out. "You know how hateful and mean she has always been to me. It's because you are so crazy about reading! I've no doubt you'd take a book from the devil."

Richard had the Baker temper. The color left his cheeks and his face worked.

"Mother! mother!" he gasped. "Give me back that book," he commanded sternly.

His eyes frightened her, but she held it fast. He tried to seize it.

"Oh, you've hurt my hand," she moaned.

Richard let go, and with the other hand his mother pulled some of the leaves out of the book and trampled them under her feet. "I'll teach

you to disobey me," she cried. "You want to kill me, between you. Lawrence and Eloise never think of minding, but you, Richard," she spoke as tragically as if she were saying, "Et tu, Brute," "you, on whom I thought I could always depend, you have done this cowardly thing. You have been disloyal to your mother and taken an enemy's bribe."

As Richard saw the destruction of his dearly prized book, he was almost beside himself with anger. It was all he could do to keep from laying violent hands on his mother.

"If you were a boy, I'd knock you down," he said. "It was n't a bribe. She is a true lady; she wanted to be kind and to help me."

"And you mean to stand up there and tell me that you dare to admire a woman, who, over and over again, has insulted your mother?"

Kate swayed unsteadily. Richard caught her and, pushing open the nearest door, led her to a seat. Kate half closed her eyes and put her hand to her left side.

"I've got that pain again; your uncle Gideon told me that I must never get excited. Good advice to give the mother of three young lion cubs."

Richard's mood suddenly changed. He was passionately attached to his mother, who, with all her faults, had the qualities that attract devotion. The other children treated her as a

force of nature against whom they must form a league, but Richard had hitherto always ranged himself on the side of law and order. He knew she was not shamming, as Eloise might have done, for his mother always "played fair." He began remorsefully to rub her hands. Kate dropped her head on his shoulder and burst into a hysterical fit of weeping. When she grew a little quieter, she said, "I know I shall go just the way grandfather is going."

"But if you live to be over ninety, that won't be so bad," said Richard, trying to laugh off her forebodings.

"It is n't so much that I minded your taking the book from her, although that was bad enough," Kate said when she had calmed down a little, "but I could n't bear to think you would hide it away from me, as if you had a guilty secret. Promise me, Richard, on your word of honor, that you will never go to that house again without letting me know, or take anything from any of the Wares without telling me."

Richard drew himself up to his full height.

"Mother, I don't want to do anything that's going to upset you, but I can't promise a thing like that. It won't be very long before I'm a man, and a man must use his own judgment. I'm sorry I hid that book. I'd ought to have had the courage to show it to you right off, but if I were to promise never to do the same thing

over again, why, some time I might break my word."

Kate looked at this big boy of hers with admiration tinged with fear. She was too exhausted, mentally and physically, to continue the combat with any hope of success, and now that her fit of temper was over, being at bottom a sensible woman with all her unreasonableness, she knew it was wiser to adjust herself as graciously as possible to the inevitable. She opened her arms wide.

"Richard, my dear boy, you do love your mother, don't you? You are n't going to break my heart by liking other people better than me?"

The undemonstrative Richard seized his mother's hand and buried his face in it.

"Mother, you know how I love you," he said.

CHAPTER XII

GIDEON BAKER'S FUNERAL

OLD Gideon Baker, the father of Gideon Patrick, was dying. He had been doing this at intervals for the last six years, until he had worn out the patience of his son and granddaughter, so when the summons came to them, they did not reach him until it was too late. There had never been any love lost between father and son, and Gideon Patrick had often made plans for the time when a part of the large Baker property should come to him. He had been straitened all his life, and there were many ways in which the money would be acceptable. In the first place they could move from the house with the white columns that was so near the mill village that its rent was merely nominal; then he could send Delia, who was now a girl of fourteen, to a fashionable Boston school, and he could ease his own labors by setting up a stable boy. He was sure that the Edgefield House would be left to him, and he meant to sell it at once. In the old days it had been the cause of more

than one hot dispute between him and his father, for the younger Gideon had begun life as a reformer.

"There 'd be no profit if I did n't sell liquor," the old man had returned. "You can run the Edgefield House as a temperance hotel when I 'm dead and gone; but I 'm going to keep my place my own way. It 's the sale of liquor that 's sending you to Harvard College, boy; if your principles are too brittle to stand the strain, you can work your way through."

Gideon's principles, where money was concerned, were of the convenient kind that bend without breaking. He reasoned that it was his father's own affair how he made his money, but the effort to make him see the error of his ways had eased his conscience. All this had happened long ago; even yesterday seemed remote, for yesterday those sharp black eyes had opened, and that rigid mouth had uttered caustic jests. The amount of feeling that was called up in him by the death of his father, this old man of ninety-seven, whose life had not been crowned with honor, came to him as an intense surprise. Gideon had known that this must come, but now that it had come it was as if the foundations of the world had given way. He was glad he had nothing to reproach himself with; if the older Gideon had not been a satisfactory father, he had always been an exemplary son.

Gideon was prepared to take charge of the funeral arrangements, but even here the eccentric old man's iron rule still held. He had told his daughter that he wanted a "cheerful funeral with plenty to eat and more than plenty to drink. Let them drink my health if they like, my very good health," he added with a grim chuckle. A little later he roused himself to say, "Don't let Gideon allow the parson to make any remarks, or read about years being a burden if one lives beyond the app'nted time. I've lived ninety odd years in the world, and mighty odd some of them have been, but I'd like to live to be a hundred and twenty, if I had my way."

It seemed a case where the Episcopal service would meet the requirements, but here again Mr. Baker had been most explicit.

Sophia and Kate followed Gideon by a later train. As they ensconced themselves comfortably in the car, Kate settled down for a long talk. After the more important topics of conversation had been disposed of, she asked Sophia if "Ed" were coming to the funeral.

"I don't think so; some of his patients are so sick that I am afraid he can't get off."

"Ed's patients have a mighty convenient way of never interfering with the things he wants to do. He took Peggy to the ball game in Concord. He does n't seem to feel that your marriage puts him under any obligations to your relatives.

Now, I 'll say for you, Sophia, that you 've treated us all like your own folks ever since you married Gideon. If any of Mrs. Ware's grand relatives had died, you 'd see that Ed would go to the funeral quick enough. I expect it 's his wife's influence that keeps him away now."

"On the contrary, Alice is going herself as long as Edmund can't get off, and Nancy will be sure to be there, for she is spending a few days in Concord with Philip."

"I never could see why she sent Philip to that church school. The Edgefield Academy is good enough for my boys. Why did she come to Edgefield so he could have a country bringing up, if she did n't mean to stay?"

"Well, he was in Edgefield two years; he was most anxious to go away to school."

"Of course he is headstrong," Kate admitted; "but that is all the more reason why his mother should be firm. A boy without a father is apt to take the reins in his own hands, and Nancy is as yielding as a stalk of grain in the wind."

"Poor Nancy," said Sophia, softly.

"Well, I don't know. Of course her husband's death was a great shock to her and very unexpected; he was the last man in the world one would suppose would die of pneumonia, but when you are a widow with a million or two, I don't think you can exactly be called 'poor Nancy.' She has seemed pretty cheerful after the first

few months. Let me see, it is two years, is n't it, since he died?"

"Almost three; you know she and Philip were in the south of France that first winter. The dear boy seems to have improved wonderfully in health."

"Her widow's veil is so becoming. It is a real trial to me that we can't wear any sort of black for grandfather, feeling as he did about it. I never saw anything like the luck the Wares have. To think of Joe Bates leaving Peggy that legacy of two thousand dollars a year, when they don't need the money."

"It is only one thousand dollars a year," Sophia interposed mildly.

"I thought you told me at the time that it was two thousand. Well, anyway, one thousand is a lot of money, and she no blood relation to him."

"Edmund saved Philip's life when he had diphtheria," Sophia reminded her, "and Joe always had a peculiar feeling about Margaret, on account of the little girl he lost."

"Well, I wish I'd known him and he'd had a peculiar feeling about Eloise."

When they reached Concord, they found Nancy Bates at the house. She had gone around to ask if she could help Mrs. Kelly, and the grateful woman had hailed her as if she were an angel from heaven.

Nancy's own sorrows were so present in her mind that the sight of Mrs. Kelly's tears made hers flow, although Mr. Baker had been one of the few persons of whom she thoroughly disapproved.

"Dear heart," said Mrs. Kelly, as she put her sturdy arm around Nancy's slender waist, "I expect it brings up your own trouble. Lean against me, dear; you won't hurt my old serge. I know what it is to be a widow, and although it's ten years since Abraham died, I don't get reconciled to it a mite. You have one comfort," she added, as she looked at Nancy's black gown, "you can wear mourning for him. Now, father was so set against it he made me take off my black dress the day after Abraham's funeral."

Kate was touched when she saw Nancy, and was as prodigal of her praise as she had been of her criticism.

On the day of the funeral the house was darkened and every one was speaking in a hushed voice. The family had assembled in the back parlor, while the friends in the front room were taking a last look at the old man. Very dignified and calm he seemed in death.

Andrew Howland with his young people and their cousin Delia did not arrive until the day of the funeral, and as the train was a little late, they had to make their way to seats just before the service began.

Kate could never be present at any scene of grief without weeping, and now, as she thought of the many laughs that she and her grandfather had had together, she was shaken with sobs.

Andrew put his hand gently on hers and said, "Kitty, darling, don't cry. He lived to a good old age."

Lawrence, now a young fellow of seventeen, caught the infection of his mother's grief and began to weep furtively.

Eloise regarded her family with ill-concealed displeasure. She had taken a seat next to Richard, for although he and she were not always on the best of terms, she could count on him not to disgrace the family. Why did her mother always get up a scene, and her father inevitably make a fool of himself by trying to quiet her in public, when he ought to know by long experience that this only made matters worse? And why could not Lawrence have more self-control? She and Richard never wore their hearts on their sleeves. And speaking of sleeves, Eloise felt very much pleased with the modern cut of hers in the jacket to her new spring suit. Now that she was old enough to help buy her own clothes, she chose quiet ones like those Peggy and Delia wore. This suit, by good fortune, happened to be a light shade of gray, and on getting the news of her great-grandfather's death, Eloise had immediately trimmed her sailor hat over with a black

ribbon. She announced that in spite of his objection to it, she was going to wear half mourning for her great-grandfather, no matter what the others did; it was a mark of respect that she felt it her duty to pay. Eloise had such a graceful figure and such wonderful hair that she was usually considered a pretty girl, and she wished there had been some young people present on whom she could make an impression, but there were only those in the family. She had hoped Philip Bates would come with his mother.

Alice arrived by the same train with the Howlands and Delia. She had not been told of Mr. Baker's peculiar views, and so she wore her winter suit, congratulating herself that it was black, and subduing her hat with a black veil. She looked so distinguished and impressive that the usher was sure she was a near relative, and so took her up to an armchair in the front of the room.

When Kate's paroxysm of weeping was over and she had time to look about her, she discovered Alice sitting near her. Kate's indignation at this slight put upon herself made her forget her grief.

"That woman always makes me so mad," she thought; "she never comes near us when we are alive, but when we are dead, she goes into black for us, and takes possession of the best armchair, as if she were the chief mourner.

She has the most top-lofty expression, the hateful thing! What is it the psalm says about 'sitting in the seat of the scornful'? That's what she does."

The dreary service was over at last, for in spite of Mr. Baker's desire to have a cheerful funeral, the fact that he had ruled out everything even remotely personal, and all music, made it drearier than usual, and the few guests who had come from a distance were asked into the dining-room by Gideon Patrick and Sarah.

Alice added to Kate's sense of injury by declining Mrs. Kelly's invitation to dinner on the plea that she had promised her step-sister that she would lunch with her and Philip.

"She is n't willing to stay and have a meal with us," Kate remarked to Sarah. "She is the proudest and most snobbish woman I ever knew."

"Now, I thought she was real pleasant," said the more charitable Sarah, "and of course it's natural she should want to lunch with her own folks."

Gideon, meanwhile, had gone out into the dining-room. The table, which was loaded down with good things to eat and drink, filled him with a kind of loathing; it seemed so grossly indecorous to go from that darkened room to this scene where all the trappings were those that one associated with hilarity. He ate little and drank nothing. It seemed to him that in the sharpness of the

mental stress through which he was passing, he was paying in full measure for his years of indifference to his father.

As soon as Kate sat down to the table she recovered her spirits. She was always a child of the moment, and so was her son Lawrence. He drank more than was good for him, and his tongue once loosened, he became a new source of trial to Eloise, who was next to him and did what she could to stem the flow of his talk. She had an investigating mind herself and had tasted the different beverages, but having a cautious disposition and a strong head, she was not affected by them. Richard, who sat on the other side of his sister, looked at her sternly, which made her take another sip from her wineglass. Between the brother who was sometimes a disgrace to her and the one who was afraid she would be a disgrace to him, Eloise felt that her life was a hard one.

Richard and his cousin Delia were very serious. It was the first funeral they had ever gone to, and the bare, cold service, followed by this lavish feast, impressed upon them the startling contrasts in life.

The burial was to be at Edgefield, and as soon as they were on the train, Gideon separated himself from the rest of the company, for he could not shake off the black mood that still held him in its strong grip. The young people sat together, but Lawrence was so noisy that Eloise threatened

to go into the next car. He was partially quieted by his cousin Delia, who felt more pity for him than disgust.

When the train reached North Edgefield, Margaret Ware, who had been spending the day with her grandmother, got in and took a vacant seat in front of her mother and her aunt Nancy. Margaret was now a tall girl of thirteen, who looked older than her years. As soon as Lawrence caught sight of her, he hastened down the car to speak to her. He was always cordial and a fluent talker, but now his usual manner was greatly exaggerated.

"Good-afternoon, Peggy," he said with a broad smile. "I'm pleased to meet you. I've been meaning to come to call on you for a long time. Hope you'll excuse me for being so long about it."

"I was sorry to hear of your grandfather's death," Margaret said with gentle dignity.

"Yes, I've just been to his funeral. He was a rare old boy, grandfather was, and he had rare old Burgundy. I think I can make a conundrum on that. Why are grandfather and his Burgundy like honey?"

He turned so as to include Margaret's mother and aunt in the question. "Can you tell me, Mrs. Ware?"

"No, I can't," said Alice, freezing perceptibly as she realized his condition.

"Because the little busy B is the beginning of all of them." He threw his head back and gave a fatuous laugh. "There's something wrong with it," he added after a minute. "Honey begins with a bee and Burgundy begins with a 'B,' but grandfather does n't. 'Boy' does, though, that's what I was thinking of, and Baker does."

Richard, who had been viewing this encounter with apprehension, now came and joined them. He took such a resolute mastery of the conversation that Lawrence soon retreated.

As Margaret was walking home she was very silent. She had liked Lawrence Howland, but what she had just seen and heard had shocked her so that she felt she never wanted to speak to him again. She was too much troubled to put her thoughts into words.

"Margaret," her mother said gently, "you see now that my feeling about the Howlands is not mere prejudice. Lawrence had an uncle who was a victim to drink. I am sorry for those boys. It is hard to have to struggle with such an inheritance."

"Richard is different. There could n't be a steadier fellow than Richard. Philip says so."

"Richard, too, is a great-grandson of old Gideon Baker, who sold liquor in a public house; a man with an unbridled temper."

"But, mother, he was Delia's grandfather;

that 's nearer still, and think how splendid she is."

"Delia is a Ware. My dear, you can't be thankful enough that your ancestors on both sides of the house were a set of God-fearing, law-abiding men."

CHAPTER XIII

THE WILL

GIDEON and Kate went back to Concord the next day with Sarah to the lonely house. As he could not long be away from his patients, they hurried through the necessary business, and the day after their arrival they had an interview with Mr. Baker's lawyer, who had the custody of his will. Now that the strain of the last few days was over, Gideon's mind began to busy itself with pleasant visions of the future.

The older Gideon had thought of his lawyer as in the prime of life, because he was so much younger than he was, but to Gideon Patrick he seemed like an old fossil. He wanted to snatch the paper from him while he was adjusting his spectacles; Gideon was always so quick in reading handwriting. The lawyer cleared his throat and began to read slowly and with difficulty. Gideon longed to tell him to skip the preamble and to get down to the bottom facts. By slow degrees he came to them at last.

Sarah had the bulk of their father's property; that was as it should be, for she had given him a home for twenty years. There were a few small

legacies; he left Kate five hundred dollars, and his great-grandchildren one hundred each, and then came the words, "To my son, Gideon Patrick, and his heirs and assigns forever, I give, devise, and bequeath my property in Edgefield known as the Edgefield House, and all the land belonging thereunto."

Gideon leaned back with a satisfied smile. After all, his father had been just. He saw Delia going to a Boston school, and lunching sometimes with Madam Lancaster in that wonderful old house on Beacon Hill, and he saw himself and Sophia moving into the Murray place in the centre of Edgefield and having a new carriage and a stable boy; this was all in the flash of a moment, while the lawyer made a pause and once more cleared his throat.

"The will is a little singular in some of its provisions," he observed. "My client was one of the most interesting of men, but he was a — individual. He says, 'I leave the said Edgefield House to my son, Gideon Patrick, in order that he can have a chance to try his favorite project of keeping a temperance hotel. But if he shall, at any time, cease to carry on the said Edgefield House, in person or through an agent, as a public house, either with or without a bar, then and in that case, the property shall go to my granddaughter, Catherine Marchant Howland, and her heirs and assigns forever, subject to the

same conditions. If she refuses, or, at any time, ceases so to carry on the said property, it shall go, subject to the same conditions, to my daughter, Sarah, widow of Abraham Kelly, and her heirs and assigns forever. And if she also declines, or ceases so to carry it on, then and in such event, I give, devise, and bequeath the said Edgefield House, with all the land belonging thereunto, to the town of Edgefield, to be used as a hospital, that shall be known as the Gideon Baker Hospital.'"

A certain sum of money was set aside for repairs, in case one of the heirs decided to accept the trust.

Gideon sat immovable while the will was being read; he had learned not to show his feelings, but he thought that his father could not have devised a will more exasperating to himself. He would either have to run the Edgefield House at a loss, or connive at the sale of liquor; or else allow the place with its large profits to pass out of his hands. He could almost see the older Gideon with his sharp black eyes looking at him through narrowed lids, and hear him say, with his grim chuckle, "Boy, I have got even with you at last!"

"That seems a very curious will," he said to the lawyer, in a calm, steady voice. "I thought it was n't legal to prevent a legatee from selling property."

The lawyer took off his glasses, wiped them, and put them on again.

"It is n't legal to directly forbid the sale," he replied, "but he has got around the law by leaving it as he has."

Gideon had a few moments of sharp, mental struggle; at the end of them he took up his abode once more in the house with the white columns, and sadly relinquished his stable boy. Delia's school was harder to forego; still she was getting a very good education at the Edgefield Academy. He saw his duty clearly; for more than forty years he had been patiently building up a record of unimpeachable integrity, and because this one temptation which he had never expected to have to face, that of acquiring money in a dishonorable way, had leaped up, as it were, and gripped him by the throat, he could not turn his back on his long record. The alternative of keeping the Edgefield House as a temperance hotel did not enter into his calculations. He was poor enough already and he could not risk losing money. He knew that the only honorable course was to give up the bequest, and persuade Kate and Sarah to do so. His sister, he was sure, would agree with him in thinking, that under the circumstances, it was a fitting tribute to their father to found the Gideon Baker Hospital.

Gideon had a feeling of moral exaltation. He had always been fairly well satisfied with the part

he played in life, but to find that he had the stamina to face his own particular temptation and get the better of it, was a cause for self-congratulation. He was sure that Sophia would feel that he was doing right. Dear Sophia! The mere thought of her seemed to bring a breath of fresh country air into this stifling room. If he could not see his personal dreams of ambition fulfilled, he would at least have a chance to realize his plans for the benefit of mankind.

Later, when the lawyer had gone, Gideon had an interview with his sister Sarah, who agreed with him at every point. To her the irascible, dictatorial invalid, who had often made her life a burden, was already changed by the softening process of death into a being whose many faults were forgotten, and whose virtues were cherished and carefully watered until they had grown from small seeds into flourishing plants.

Sarah felt with Gideon that it was their sacred duty to further their father's benevolent scheme, and to perpetuate his name by means of the Edgefield hospital.

The next thing was to convert Kate to their opinion. He asked her if she would have a talk with him after dinner while her aunt Sarah was taking her nap.

Kate had a restless way of changing from one chair to another; in this case they were all equally uncomfortable, and every time she got

up, Gideon rose punctiliously. He had an automatic way of doing it, and a complacent smile that exasperated Kate.

"Gideon," she said at last, "you make me as nervous as a witch, by popping up every time I do, like a Jack-in-the-box. I guess you can let up a little on style as long as it's only me."

He drew a straight-backed chair over to her.

"We won't begin by quarreling; I am anxious to please you. I suppose that is the real secret of good manners."

"Is it? It sometimes seems to me as if they were meant to annoy. Eloise has taken to bobbing up whenever I come into the room. It is like a kind of advertisement that you are young and up to date."

Gideon found it hard to talk seriously when Kate was in this frivolous mood, but at last he turned the conversation to the important subject, and explained his plans.

He talked on for a long time in his even, courteous voice. He seemed the embodiment of comfortable superiority as he sat there in his well-fitting clothes, occasionally giving his niece a benevolent glance from his soft brown eyes, and sometimes filling in a hiatus in his explanation by stroking his brown moustache. He grew eloquent on the theme of putting aside the idea of personal advantage and thinking of the larger issues of life.

"It will be a great thing for Edgefield to have the hospital," he said. "Edmund Ware has wanted one for a long time, but in this case I can keep the control in my own hands."

When he paused at last, Kate sat up very straight and looked at him in wonder.

"Do you mean to tell me that you are going to let a valuable piece of property slip out of your hands like that?" she asked.

"Yes; under the circumstances it seems the only honorable course."

"Then I will take it."

"You? You mean to say —" he lost his accustomed fluency and fairly stammered. "You mean that you, a woman, will undertake to run a hotel that has so gone downhill since father kept it, that it is n't respectable? You mean that you — you will go contrary to the wishes of your grandfather's children?"

"I mean that I will take the property that is left me."

"But it is one of the worst holes in the county."

"I will make it respectable."

"You will lose money on it, unless you sell liquor."

"That is my own affair."

Kate rose, and he sprang to his feet, too. The softness had gone from his face and there was an unpleasant expression about the corners of his mouth; uncle and niece faced each other.

"I have n't forgotten how you made me give you one of my biggest marbles when we were children," she said. "You told me marbles were for boys. I know you, root and branch, and you need n't try to fool me into believing you would have all these fine ideas about benefiting the human race, if you were free to sell the property. Anyway, I have n't got them; I need money. Andrew's no help to me, I have to do it all. Richard is working hard enough, poor boy, to get through Dartmouth, and I want to help him, and I want to send him to the Medical School; and Lawrence is crazy to go to Harvard later on with Philip Bates, and Eloise has set her heart on going to a Boston school."

"Do you suppose I don't want money just as much as you do?"

"Of course you do. We are both chips of the old block. You need n't try to fool me, Gideon Baker; we may as well be frank with each other. I adore you when you are just your natural self."

Suddenly Gideon saw himself as he appeared to Kate. It was as if she had pulled off a mask from his face, and she did not stay her destruction there; his ideals, too, seemed torn away by her ruthless hand.

"If there's money in it, I want to keep it myself," he said. "At least I do if we can make it respectable, and stop the sale of liquor."

Kate felt that if her husband had only been a

man like her uncle, there were no social heights to which they could not climb; but Andrew was a clog on her ambition, and Sophia a handicap to his; it always took a man and a woman to accomplish the best results.

“I can help you in no end of ways, if you will give me part of the money the hotel will bring in,” she said. “We can alter it and make the old house hum. We’ll turn it into a place for summer boarders, and rechristen it ‘The Edgefield Inn.’ It will be fun to get even with grandfather. Come, let’s make a compromise.”

Gideon looked at her for a long moment in silence. He had an uncomfortable presentiment that any compromise with Kate would be the beginning of a compromise with his principles; and yet, since she insisted upon taking the property, if he let it go, it was surely better to keep the control of it in his own hands, aiding her by his counsels and sharing in the profits.

“Well, Gideon?” she asked impatiently.

“I’ll do it,” he answered, as he took her outstretched hand.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BALL

KATE and Gideon deplored the slow processes of the law, and later, when the estate was settled, it was hard for them to bear the many delays of the Edgefield workmen. Kate was in her element. She felt that her talents had been buried for years, but that she had a chance at last to show what she could do with them.

All Edgefield looked on with skepticism that gradually changed to surprise and grudging admiration, as the Edgefield House went through its purification and became the Edgefield Inn. The hardest thing to accomplish was the uprooting of Jerry McKnight, a Scotchman, who had been the landlord ever since Mr. Baker had retired from the position. Jerry could see no reason why the new manager should dispense with his services, and he scoffed openly at the idea of keeping the place as a temperance hotel. It increased the grudge he harbored against Dr. Baker when Gus Leggett and his wife were installed as the new landlord's assistants. Maria was one of the best cooks in the county, while

Gus's accomplishments lay in the direction of doing nothing that he considered hard work, but never grudging the amount of time and trouble he took, if fishing or shooting were in question. As the Leggetts' own house was now almost literally falling about their heads, they had been glad to move, with their children, to an unfinished ell in the Edgefield Inn, hoping in time to save enough money to rebuild their farmhouse and retire to it for the rest of their lives.

Kate decided that, in order to win the social prestige she coveted, the opening of the new hotel must be celebrated by a ball, at which she and Sophia Baker and Mrs. Joseph Bates should be the patronesses.

Alice could not understand how her step-sister could agree to be one of the matrons at the ball. She was sure that if the tragedy of losing her husband should come to her, neither four years nor forty could dull the keen edge of her grief. Henceforth she would walk through life in the sombre garb of deepest widowhood, as one apart; but Nancy had already lightened her mourning, and she had entered into the life of the town as her step-sister had never done.

The pleasure Alice took in Nancy's ardent affection and warm sympathy was almost over-balanced by her jealousy. Alice did not use so crude a word in her self-communings; it seemed suggestive of an uncontrolled temper, and she

was glad that she had not shown her husband or her daughter that she sometimes found it hard to bear their absorption in her step-sister's society. It had always been so from their earliest youth; Nancy, with no intention on her part, had often drawn away the friends Alice had wanted to keep exclusively her own.

Alice accepted Mrs. Howland's invitation to the ball, for Edmund was so eager to go, and besides, she did not wish to appear to resent her very marked slight in omitting to ask her to be one of the patronesses. Alice and Edmund were both in accord in feeling sure that the hours were too late for Margaret, and the company too promiscuous.

"But Delia and Eloise are going," she pleaded.

"They are a year and a half older than you are," said her mother.

"Philip says of course I must go."

Philip had already brought many changes into her life; her father and mother deplored them, but they were not always strong enough to stand against the tide.

"Philip need n't think that he is going to settle all our family affairs," said her father, testily.

"Not all, father; just this one. He has engaged me for three dances."

Margaret picked up her short skirt, as if it were a train, and began waltzing around the room.

“Wait a minute,” she said, and she returned presently with her thick braid of yellow hair turned up at the end, and tied with a ribbon. “Don’t I look quite grown up, father?” she asked.

“Altogether too grown up, Peggy. I can’t have my little girl, who is n’t fifteen, going to a ball at a public house and dancing with Tom, Dick, and Harry.”

“But I only want to dance with Philip, Edmund, and Gideon.”

“You’re an impertinent little monkey, but your sauce will not help you to get to the ball,” said her father.

It was hard for Margaret to watch the preparations of Delia and Eloise for the great event. Eloise was secretly delighted that Peggy was not to be at the dance, for Philip never paid her the slightest attention if his pretty cousin was present. Eloise had already decided that she was going to marry Philip as soon as he was out of college, and the fact that he seemed to despise her now only added zest to her pursuit. He was the handsomest boy she had ever seen, and he had such a large fortune that he could buy up half of Edgefield, and he could take her to interesting parts of the world. She was not going to rust out, as her mother had done; without half her beauty she meant to make her brains procure whatever she wanted most in life.

As Alice and Edmund drove up to the door of

the inn on the night of the ball, Gus Leggett came forward to take their horse to the stable. "You here, Gus?" Dr. Ware said in a tone that made the younger man mutter an oath, as he watched the doctor and his beautiful wife go through the door into the brilliantly lighted passage way. In the ball-room Dr. and Mrs. Ware made their way to the three receiving ladies.

Kate eclipsed the others both in point of good looks and brilliancy of dress. The strangers who were present inquired who that distinguished-looking woman was. It was Kate's hour of triumph. She felt that all the dull years that preceded it were worth living through for the satisfaction of this preëminence.

"I am so glad you could come to-night, Mrs. Ware," she said in a tone of gentle patronage, as Alice shook hands with her. "Edmund, take Mrs. Ware to a seat on the other side of the room — I am sorry it is so crowded at this end."

Alice and Edmund sank into obscurity in seats near two old ladies who were full of placid joy in having an occasion sufficiently important to do honor to their five-year-old black silks.

"What a wonderful place this assembly hall is!" Alice exclaimed, as she looked at its white paneling and oak beams.

"It is more than a hundred years old," Edmund said. "Kate and Gideon have shown great taste."

Alice was wondering if she had made a mistake in not letting Margaret come and look on. The ball-room had been transformed into what she would consider a fairy bower, by means of numerous Japanese lanterns, and masses of daisies, sweet peas, and roses.

Edmund begged Alice to waltz with him, but she said she preferred to look on. He seemed so like a chained hound that she had not the heart to keep him by her.

"Don't feel obliged to stay with me if you want to dance," she said, and after a few murmured excuses he was off like a shot.

Presently Philip came over to her. "Aunt Alice," he said, "I think I ought to tell you that I have just telephoned to Margaret to be ready when I come for her, for I am going to drive back and bring her to the ball."

"But, my dear boy, have you spoken to her father?"

"You bet I have n't! Uncle Edmund would make a great fuss, but he won't say anything if she is once here. Look at him now and say if it is n't sheer cruelty for an elderly parent who feels the joy of waltzing as he does, to keep his little girl out of it?"

An elderly parent! The words made Alice wince. But surely Philip was joking, for Edmund seemed the impersonation of youth and life!

Presently she saw that the line of receiving ladies had diminished, and that her husband was dancing with his cousin.

"I did n't know my mother could waltz like that!" Philip exclaimed with admiration; "I'll have to take her out for a turn myself."

Nancy was looking up at her tall partner with that confiding, radiant expression that charmed every one. When she laughed, one felt that the tears lay not very far behind, and when she wept, her tears seemed the prelude to a smile, for laughing or weeping, her unvarying sympathy seemed to embrace the whole world. Her gauzy white gown with its black trimmings floated gracefully behind her; there was no one else in the room who had the same air of individuality; it claimed attention as surely as beauty does. Strangers were impressed with Kate first, then they discovered Alice in her corner, and next they saw Nancy, and having found her, their eyes returned to her again and again.

All the concentrated jealousy and bitterness of the last twenty years flamed up in Alice as she watched Nancy and Edmund. They danced as only those can who have had long practice, and she could not bear to think of the many years of their youth in which she had had no part.

Edmund at last took his cousin back to her place and a moment later he was waltzing with Kate Howland. She looked up at him with

conscious pride and said something that set them both laughing. This evening seemed to Alice the epitome of her married life. She had left home and friends for Edmund, only asking that for the rich life she had given up she should have his undivided allegiance. And while he loved her best — of this she never doubted — he was often bored by too steady an amount of her society, and was pleased, now with this diversion, now with that, like a child with a new toy. She prayed heaven that her daughter might never love with such a consuming passion as her own. Philip was already beginning to show for Margaret more than the regard of a cousin. If their early attachment should ripen into a stronger feeling, she would be comparatively at ease about her child, for an affection that came gradually was so much safer than a sudden, overwhelming love.

Philip was stopped on his way out of the hall by Eloise Howland, who had arrived with her cousin Delia. Eloise had contrived that they should be late, so that her entrance might cause a sensation. It was the first time that she had worn a train and piled her curly red locks on the top of her small head, and the result was so satisfactory to herself that she hoped it would gratify others. She was delighted with the impression she made on Philip.

“Good gracious, Eloise, I did n’t know you at first,” he said. “What have you done to yourself?”

You must give me three dances, later on. I'm going for Peggy now."

"For Peggy? I thought she was n't coming. A ball-room is n't the place for kids."

"She's coming all right."

"Let Richard go for her. He does n't care about dancing;" and Eloise looked at her serious brother who was watching the waltzers from a corner.

"No, I must go myself. I have telephoned that I am coming."

"It always takes her forever to get ready. You'll have time to take me out for a turn. I promised this dance to another man, but I'll make him wait." She did not think it necessary to add that the other man was her brother Lawrence, between whom and herself there was a compact that she was to be engaged to him whenever she found it convenient.

So Philip waited for just one dance, and Eloise proved such a stimulating partner that he tore himself away from her with regret. He had kept poor Margaret waiting for a quarter of an hour, for she had strained every nerve to be ready in time.

Her childish heart was overflowing with gratitude to this big cousin who had brought such wonderful things to pass. When she reached the ball-room, it did not trouble her that she was the only girl in a short frock. Her simple white

dress and pink sash were afterwards always regarded lovingly by her, because in them she had had such a wonderful evening. It had begun with a disappointment. In spite of all the trouble her cousin had taken in her behalf he did not dance with her so much as she had hoped he would. Eloise seemed to draw him like a magnet, and this was natural, for she was dressed like a grown-up lady. But there were other people besides Philip; her adorable father, for instance, who, after his burst of displeasure was over, shrugged his shoulders, gave a little laugh, and then waltzed with her himself. Lawrence Howland danced the Lancers with her, and her uncle Gideon asked if he might engage her for supper, while all the time Richard was looking at her from his far corner, too shy to come to speak to her. Margaret felt sorry for him, because he did not dance, and she finally asked Lawrence if his brother knew how to dance the Portland Fancy.

“Oh! yes, he’s just bashful. That’s the trouble with him.”

“I’d like to dance it with him,” said Peggy. “I’ve danced with every one else I know. Won’t you go and get him?”

Lawrence laughed. “If you don’t beat Eloise for brass!” he exclaimed.

“I would n’t ask any one else, but he looks as if he would like to dance if somebody asked him,”

whereupon Lawrence, with another laugh, went off and dragged Richard out of his corner.

Although Richard was almost twenty-one, Margaret never regarded him as a grown-up person, because he seemed so shy and ill at ease in society. Instead of asking if he might have the pleasure of dancing with her, he said awkwardly, "Lawrence says you want me to dance the Portland Fancy with you."

"Yes," said Peggy, a little abashed by his manner. "Do you mind so very much?"

He glanced at her charming face full of friendliness and pleasure in the occasion; although he did not like girls in general, he thought it would not be half bad to dance with her, for she was not old enough to have the airs and graces of a young lady.

"I'm rather awkward at it, but I don't mind if you don't," he answered, and with this cheering speech poor Peggy was obliged to content herself, as they made their way to the line of dancers that was forming.

Dancing the Portland Fancy was a most exciting performance to one of Peggy's temperament. Richard was something of a check on her pleasure, because every now and then he would forget and start to do the wrong figure, but she was so pleased to think that he was dancing, instead of looking on, that she was willing to put up with this drawback. She even succeeded in

making him talk and laugh. By the time they reached Eloise and Philip, Richard was entirely at his ease, and Peggy was overflowing with good spirits. Eloise could no longer hold Philip's attention which was concentrated on Peggy.

"You've got to save the rest of your dances for me, young lady, and remember, I want to take you out to supper," he said.

"I'm engaged for supper," Peggy answered demurely, as she passed him on her way to the next set.

When the dance was over, Richard took Margaret back to her mother. Alice was too beautiful and distinguished-looking to remain long in obscurity. If her husband had temporarily forgotten her existence, her brother-in-law had not. Gideon hoped that she would change her purpose and dance, so he brought up one after another of the men who had come from a distance. Some of them were from Boston, and Alice was surprised to find how agreeable they were, although they were not in her particular set; for they could talk on subjects of general interest, such as city politics, the theatre, and the symphony rehearsals, topics which did not interest her Edgefield friends. One of them, she found, had read all the newest books, and was glad to discuss them with her. He was a friend of one of her Lancaster cousins, and had twice been to her grandmother's house, which warmed Alice's

heart to him at once. For the last four years she and Margaret had spent a fortnight with Madam Lancaster every winter, and Alice looked forward to this period as a thirsty traveler welcomes an oasis in the desert.

When it was time for supper, Edmund came back to his wife.

"Is n't the ball a grand success?" he inquired. "Kate's thinking of having a smaller dance every Saturday evening. Won't that be great?" He did not notice that Alice did not answer, and continued cheerfully, "It's a pity you would n't dance, but I saw you seemed to be having plenty of people to talk to."

"Yes, no thanks to you," the natural woman wanted to reply; but the well-trained one answered, "I have met some very pleasant people."

"You'd better take my arm here, it is so crowded," he said, as they were passing through the narrow passage way into the dining-room. "Does n't Nancy dance like a dream?" he went on. "It is more than twenty years since I've danced with her, and she waltzes just as well as she ever did. What old chap is it who talks about the poetry of motion? By the way, who's looking after Peggy?"

"Her uncle Gideon."

"That's all right."

When they reached the dining-room, they found that Peggy was surrounded by black coats.

Philip had watched with some curiosity and a feeling of resentment to see who was going to take her out to supper, and when he saw her with Dr. and Mrs. Baker, he gave a little laugh of relief.

Peggy looked back at him with a mischievous glance. This caused Philip to stick to her like a bur all through supper, while Richard supplied her with lobster salad, and once having arrived, could not be dislodged; and Lawrence brought her some lemonade and decided that he would outstay Richard and Philip. It was no wonder that her father and mother decided that, if there were to be weekly dances at the Edgefield Inn, their daughter was too young to go to them. On her account they went home soon after midnight, and it was then that Eloise's pleasure in the evening returned.

As for Peggy, she was so blissfully happy that she meant to stay awake for hours just to think about it, but she fell asleep while her father and mother were still sitting before the open fire that the cool July night made possible, talking over her future. Peggy was rapidly getting out of their hands. Her mother had taught her all she knew, and Miss Locke, who had supplemented Alice's teaching, was going to Europe. It became painfully evident that something must be done for Peggy's education, and it came to her mother, with a sinking of the heart, that it was time to send her to a Boston school.

CHAPTER XV

AT SUNRISE

THAT was a wonderful summer for Margaret. The fact that her father and mother were thinking of sending her to a Boston school in the autumn, and letting her spend the year with her great-grandmother Lancaster, gave a keen edge to each day of her freedom; for although Margaret's loving heart cared for nearly every one, and her quick mind was interested in all sides of life, her grandmother Lancaster was not so dear to her as her grandmother Ware, and the house with the purple windows that stood to Alice for all that was best in life meant a certain amount of restraint to Peggy; and living in town could not compare for a single moment with the pleasure of wandering hatless and sunshadeless over the Edgefield hills, taking long drives with her father, or going with Philip in a canoe on the river.

Philip was too much with his friends, the Howlands, and Margaret was seeing more of them than her father and mother approved. It was not easy to prevent it, for, as they were Delia's cousins, they were always included in the picnics and tea parties that Delia's mother planned. It had been easy to keep Peggy away

from them when they were children, but the distance of the Howland farm from the village had miraculously shortened, now that the boys had grown up. Her father and mother disliked to put a check on her simple pleasures, but they felt obliged to make a stand occasionally; and when it came to a plan for walking up Howland's Hill to see the sunrise, her father put his foot down firmly, and said she could not go.

"But, father," she pleaded, "Aunt Sophia is going with us herself. I can spend the night with Delia, so it won't bother you having me get up so early. Fanny and Doris are going."

"I don't know why the fact that there are some foolish parents in the world should make me change my mind. You'd be completely worn out getting up so early."

"Please, father, just this once. I'd love to see the sunrise."

"If you're so terribly keen on seeing the sunrise, you can go into the spare room any morning about half-past four."

"You are the most exasperating person I ever knew in my life," said Peggy, hotly. "I want to see the sunrise from the top of Howland's Hill."

"If that's what you want, I'll take you there some morning, myself."

"Father, you are too horrid for anything. Of course I want to go with the others. Mother

understands, don't you, mother? We are to have crackers and milk at Aunt Sophia's; then we are all to walk over to the Howland farm, and the Howlands are going to take us up the hill, and we are to have breakfast with them on the way back."

"It's an absurd plan," said her father, "and I can't let you go, so there is no need of talking any more about it."

Peggy did not give up so easily. It might be said that in the next few days she fairly bombarded her father and mother with arguments, in the hope that they would yield in the end; but just as her father began to weaken, her mother grew firm as adamant, for Alice was too careful a disciplinarian to approve of yielding to pressure.

When Peggy went to bed on the evening before the expedition, her father said, as he bade her good-night, "You'll be a great deal fresher and happier to-morrow morning than if you'd gone with those other foolish young people."

Peggy made one last appeal. "If I wake up, father, may n't I go with them?" she asked.

"I don't believe there is the least danger of your waking up."

It took Margaret a long time to go to sleep. She usually accepted the restrictions in her lot with the same cheerful philosophy with which she made the best of a rainy day; but now the

family decree seemed unreasonable, for she was just as strong as Delia.

Margaret had some hours of restless sleep, then she waked up just as the clock was striking three. This was the fateful hour. She pictured the gathering of the clans and the merry walk in the morning twilight. A mosquito buzzed around her head. It would certainly be far better for her health to be out in the morning air than fighting mosquitoes in her room. She remembered Philip's parting advice. "If you wake up, you had better come with us. Your father won't mind any more than he did when you went to the ball." Some minutes passed while she was debating the matter with her conscience. Finally a rooster in a neighboring yard gave a loud crow and another answered him. "If those things are going to keep up such a racket, of course I can't go to sleep again; that settles it," she thought. She sprang up and began to dress hastily. The fear of being too late gave a trembling eagerness to all her motions, and when she tried to tie strings, or fasten hooks and eyes, her fingers seemed turned to thumbs. But at last she was ready, and with a long sigh of satisfaction she unlocked the front door and ran swiftly along the village street. She reached her aunt's house in a breathless condition, only to find that the blinds were closed and there were no signs of life about the place. She went to the ell of the house and called up to the

maid. After a time a sleepy voice told her that the party had started some time before.

Margaret sat down limply on the kitchen doorstep, and her disappointment was almost more than she could bear. Once having started, however, it was not easy for her to turn back, and she made up her mind that she would go on to the Howland farm. If she could not overtake the others, she could at least see the sunrise and join them at breakfast.

Margaret never forgot that silent walk in the morning twilight. As she passed through the village streets with their closed blinds, it seemed as if the world had paused in its restless life. When she left the town behind her and turned into the wood road that led to the farm, it was as if a spell of enchantment had been laid on all her friends, and she were the only conscious human being in the world. Once she heard, coming from a bush, the clear notes of a bird that was so close to her she could have put her hand on its nest: and her feathered friend had no fear, for this was the hour when it was God's world and not man's.

As Margaret approached the Howlands' farmhouse, she saw that here too the blinds were closed, but in her present mood she was not sorry to have the wonder and the mystery of the sunrise to herself. As she passed the front door she heard footsteps, and presently Richard Howland came out and joined her.

"The others went up the hill twenty minutes ago," he said. "It's a perfect shame that they did n't wait for you."

"They did n't know I was coming. Why did n't you go with them?"

"Because mother had one of her 'spells,' and I wanted to stay until she was quite over it. I told them I'd meet them as they were coming down. I know a place halfway up where we can get a fine view. We'll have more than time to get there if you would like to go."

"I'd just love to."

Richard walked along in front of her, for the path was narrow, holding back branches that came in her way, but saying nothing. When they reached the place he had spoken of, Margaret saw that the trees had been cleared away and the sleeping village and the hills were spread out before them.

"You may as well sit down," said Richard, pointing to a rock, and perching on a higher one. "The show always begins promptly, but we have ten minutes to wait."

Below them the valley was full of mist like a great inland lake. Here and there some chimneys rose above it as if the houses they belonged to were submerged.

"I did n't know we could see our house from here," said Margaret. "Look at our chimneys over there."

"You can see the peak of the roof, too, on a clear day."

It was growing lighter all the time, and this seemed so unnatural for twilight that Margaret still felt as if she were under a spell. She turned her shining eyes on her companion.

"Is n't it wonderful?" she exclaimed.

"Yes; I've seen the sunrise so often that it's an old story to me, yet I never get used to it."

It was as easy to express her thoughts to this shy and yet wholly comprehending person as it was to think them. "It seems as if God were so much nearer," she said in an awed voice.

"I've often thought that. Sometimes when things have gone very wrong with me, or we've had a family row, for I've got an awful temper—"

"I don't believe it," she broke in, "I guess it's just that your family are terribly exasperating."

"They don't think so, and I guess they are right. When I am just raging mad, I come up here and think things out, and it does n't seem as if there were anything in the world worth troubling about; it seems as if it were all peace and beauty, and as if we ought to thank God for giving us a chance to live."

"I just love to live," said Margaret, standing up and flinging her arms apart with an impetuous motion, as if she were scattering blessings on all mankind.

"Now do you? Well, I should think you would."

"Don't you? I thought you just said you did."

"It seems like this to me," he replied slowly.

"You see things have never gone very smooth with me; we have n't had much money, and I've never had time for any fun; so the world seems like a grand good place for fighting. I've had to fight for an education, and I expect to have a hard time getting through the Medical School, and when I'm a doctor, I shall have to fight disease."

"And it has all been so easy for Philip," Margaret commented. "It does n't seem fair."

"Look!" he cried.

Above the mist that enveloped the lower part of East Mountain there was a spark as of a beacon light. Margaret gave a little sigh of wonder. The beacon flamed higher, and then the edge of the sun showed in clear outline above the mist. Higher and higher it rose until it hung like a red ball over the hills.

Margaret had a sense of disappointment that the sight was over.

"Shall we go on and meet the others?" Richard asked.

"Oh, no. Let's wait here for them."

Gradually the world became its old, familiar self, and Margaret's trials were once more present to her mind.

"Is n't it terrible that I may have to go to school in Boston next winter?" she asked.

"Terrible? I'd just give my eye teeth if I could be there. Why don't you want to go to school in Boston?"

"I hate to study. I never have had to go to school. I just love to browse along; it did n't seem like studying when mother and Miss Locke taught me, and then I've got to live with my great-grandmother. I am fond of her, of course, but she's terribly particular, and I hate being shut up in a city. But you see I'm fifteen. Is n't it awful? I shall be a young lady before I know it, and mother wants me to come out in Boston, and she says if I expect to know anybody, I must go to the right school first, and to dancing school. Father says it is all nonsense. He wants me to go to the Edgefield Academy, but I don't know enough mathematics to get in, so I'd have to be a special student, but anything would be better than going away from home. I hope father will have his way, but mother wants grandmother to teach me good manners."

"Your manners are all right."

"I shall tell mother what you say," she responded with a joyous little laugh.

"I hate too many frills," he went on. "Eloise is making our lives a burden because she insists that Lawrence and I shall pull back her chair and mother's at meals. I'd just as lief do it for mother, but I draw the line at Eloise."

"Oh, but that is what every boy ought to do

for his sister. Philip always pulls back my chair. Uncle Gideon says the frills are like the trimming to a hat. It will keep you warm with just a ribbon around it, but it does n't give pleasure to other people unless it has pretty bows, or flowers, or feathers. He says good manners, like the right trimming to a hat, make people know at once that you 've come from the right shop."

"I'm afraid they'll always think I've come from the wrong one," he said ruefully, "because I can't remember to do all the stunts. Won't you sit down, Miss Ware?" And he put his hands on the rock with a flourish as if he were pulling back a chair. It was such a good imitation of his uncle Gideon's manner that Margaret laughed.

"Oh, see this lovely, fragrant fir-balsam," she said, taking hold of a small, evergreen tree. "Do break off a branch for me. I'd like to make a scent bag for my handkerchiefs."

Richard took out his knife and cut off a branch, and handed it to her.

"I'll give you part of it," she said, as she broke off a piece.

"I can't do anything with it; you'd better take it all."

In the distance they heard Eloise's laugh and Philip's voice. Presently the party of girls and boys and Aunt Sophia would join them, and turn this wonderful morning into an ordinary day.

“So you don’t want to keep something in memory of the sunrise?” and Margaret let the sprig of fir-balsam drop.

As the voices came nearer and nearer, Richard silently stooped and picked it up.

CHAPTER XVI

THE WHOLE TRUTH

THAT morning walk sealed Margaret's fate, for it brought her father to the point of reluctantly agreeing that it was best to send her into a different atmosphere for a time; and so she went to school in Boston the next winter and lived with Madam Lancaster.

Margaret departed with a sense of dejection that was nearer to despair than anything she had ever felt, but proceeded to have an unexpectedly delightful time. She and her great-grandmother soon became excellent friends. Peggy's gay little work-bag flung down in the middle of the table, and her books, which she never took the trouble to arrange primly, had such a cheerful look that Madam Lancaster could seldom find it in her heart to reprove her for the liberties that she took with her drawing-room.

Margaret had been sent away from home to learn the finer shades of good breeding, but in the process her great-grandmother's manners were more altered than her own.

If her first year in Boston had been happy, the second one was almost like a fairy tale in its joy; for Delia came down to be at her school and to

share her room at Madam Lancaster's. But alas! for Peggy's short-lived happiness! Towards the end of the winter Delia's mother fell on the ice and broke her leg, and Delia hastened home to nurse her.

When Kate heard the family news, she felt that her opportunity had come and suggested to Gideon that Eloise should take Delia's place at school.

"Now that Richard is in the Medical School and Lawrence at Harvard, she won't be homesick," Kate declared.

"Homesick!" Gideon repeated with his dry laugh; "Eloise is the kind of young person who feels about home the way the young robins do about their nest: as if it were a place made on purpose for the joy of getting out of it."

A little later Kate learned that Eloise, through her own initiative, had secured the position of companion to Madam Lancaster.

"Is n't she smart?" Kate said to Gideon. "I never need worry over her."

Eloise's skill and tact made her a valuable assistant, but there was an indefinable something in the girl that prevented Madam Lancaster from getting fond of her.

Alice was greatly disturbed when she heard that her grandmother had taken Eloise into her house, for she had sent Margaret away from home to sever her connection with the undesirable

Howlands; and to have Eloise storm the citadel and intrench herself there was too exasperating for words. Her presence spoiled the pleasure of Alice's visit when she went down for a few days in the spring, for she saw that Eloise was gradually usurping Margaret's prerogatives.

Eloise sat in one of the carved, high-backed chairs in the drawing-room as if she had never known anything else at the farm, and the Copley and Stuart portraits might have been *her* ancestors from the interest she took in them.

By far the most undesirable feature of the affair, however, was the fact that Eloise's brothers were now in Boston. Lawrence came to the house the very evening that Mrs. Ware arrived. He had already acquired something of his sister's polish, which Mrs. Ware considered merely a veneer, and his unflagging good spirits made him impervious to the frigidity of her manner.

Richard, on the other hand, who called a few evenings later, was so ill at ease that Alice could only extract monosyllables from him. Eloise was in despair about this brother, for he did not seem to mind how shabby his clothes were, and he was appallingly silent in society, but only too ready to discuss such topics as microbes and the X-rays with Peggy and herself.

Alice was sure, that in her heart of hearts, her grandmother could not enjoy being twisted

around her young companion's finger; but Eloise had made herself so useful that Alice saw she must leave the discovery of her imperfections to time.

After Alice's return to Edgefield she missed Margaret more than ever. Her father and mother had not realized until she left home how little variety there was in their life without her. The moment she came back on a vacation the silent house miraculously swarmed with young people, and when she went away again, it was as instantly deserted.

When it came to the question of sending her back for still another year, both Edmund and Alice felt that it would be almost impossible to endure a longer separation; but their daughter had taken root in the new soil, and was anxious to finish school with her class.

Alice felt that the time had come to which she had been looking forward through all these unsatisfactory years, when they could leave Edgefield for the winter months with a clear conscience, and have the rich, full life of Boston. Edmund had always said that when he was fifty, he should feel that he had earned the right to work less hard, and for the last year he had had an assistant; so Alice felt that he could leave his patients in good hands. She was sure that what her husband needed most was to associate with men who were his equals. She had buried

herself in Edgefield to please him for almost twenty-five years, and it was only fair that he should now make some small sacrifice for her. Alice was not by nature a wire puller, but she had spent the last year in assiduously pulling wires in such a dignified way that she hoped no one would discover what she had done. She flattered herself that her wires were always buried under ground. She worked to such advantage that Edmund was asked to take the place for six months, of an assistant instructor at the Medical School, the following year.

Margaret was spending a week at Nahant with Madam Lancaster when the letter came. Edmund and Alice were sitting at the breakfast table, and Alice watched her husband's face with carefully subdued excitement. He finally tossed the letter across the table to her.

"Edmund," she cried, "is n't this great? And such a high compliment to you, but a well-deserved one."

"Yes, it's the kind of offer a man likes to have," he acknowledged, "but it would be an awful bore to get up the lectures, and I shan't do it, of course."

"You won't do it?" Alice turned pale, and she had a feeling of bitter, unreasonable resentment against Edmund. For a moment she had forgotten that her wires were buried under ground; she was thinking it was the overhead system.

Could it be possible that all her work and planning had gone for nothing? She felt sick at heart.

"Go? I'd rather be tarred and feathered than buckle down to teaching."

"But, Edmund, it will be so good for you to be brought in contact with all those fresh, young minds. You've never made the most of your talents, and you would find it so stimulating to meet men of note, and then we could spend the winter in Boston in a little apartment, and have Margaret with us."

"Spend the winter in Boston! Leave my patients! Nothing in this world would make me do it!"

"Jack Murray is so thoroughly competent and is doing so much for you anyway that he might as well take the whole care for six months. You could easily run up to Edgefield if any one were dangerously ill. You always said that at fifty you would be willing to work less hard," she reminded him.

"Yes, but when I said that, I did n't know I was going to feel like twenty-five. Why, I don't feel a day older than I did when I married you, Alice."

She glanced across at him in speechless wonder; although outwardly she looked even younger than he, she felt that the years of their marriage had changed her from an enthusiastic girl into a middle-aged woman without illusions.

"Edmund," she said unsteadily, "for twenty-four years I have been doing my best to make you happy. Can't you do this one thing for me?"

"For you? Why, what do you mean? There has n't been a day in all these twenty-four years when I have n't been trying to do something for you."

"Yes, I know, dear."

"We have been so happy," he went on, "and I should be perfectly miserable caged up in Boston. I'd rather be shot. Do you seriously mean that you would like to live there?"

Alice's sense of bitterness increased. For all these long years she had been trying to keep her rebellious feelings and her homesickness to herself, and this was all that he knew of her! He had been going on in his optimistic, self-indulgent way, and because she did not complain, as other women would have done, but had given up to his desires at every point, he had calmly assumed that she had nothing left to wish for!

Alice had always felt that to give way to one's temper was a sign that one belonged to a lower stratum of society with which she had never concerned herself. It was women like Mrs. Howland who lost their tempers. But if Alice did not lose hers, she had found it, and the discovery that she had in herself this seething, dammed-up flood of unexpressed complaints was a shock to her.

"I seriously mean that I should like to live there," she said in a low voice. Her hands were clasped under the table. She was glad Edmund could not see how they trembled.

Discontent can express itself in other ways than by words, and Edmund had a feeling of painful surprise as he saw his wife's white face. There was a long silence. Alice had certain moods in which Edmund felt it was as hopeless to try to reach her as to penetrate a stone wall. He got up and took two quick turns around the room.

"I did n't think of your making this a personal matter," he said at last, "but if you want so much to be in Boston this winter,"—his eyes were on Alice, and the change that came over her at this point made him feel as if a marble woman had become flesh and blood,—"you'd better go there with Margaret," he ended, and the color and light went out of her face as quickly as they had come.

"Without you? Oh, no! I could not be happy away from you. I should not feel it right to leave you. But if you gave those lectures, you might come down for part of the week."

"I am not going to give those lectures; I never could be a good lecturer. I know what I can do and what I can't do, and there is no use in trying to talk me over. You would n't like to be cooped up in a flat in Boston for six months, when it came to the point, any better than I should. You

don't realize how hard it is for birds who have been free to be caged."

Then Alice spoke from the depths of her heart, and in the one brief sentence was all the repressed discontent of twenty-four years.

"There has not been a single day in all these long years that I have not wished we could live there."

She was surprised at the effect of her words. The brightness went out of her husband's face, and for the moment he looked haggard and middle-aged.

"And I was fool enough to think that I had made you happy!" Then he turned and went out of the room.

Alice was left sitting at her end of the breakfast table with her empty coffee cup by her plate, and the letter that caused all this trouble. She had sat thus for so many mornings when her husband had had to hurry away that it was almost impossible to realize that there was such a difference now. Why did her words trouble him so? She had been very self-restrained. How could he have helped knowing the truth, long ago? And then a flood of love and tenderness swept over her. If she had told the truth, it was only half of it; for if each day had held its portion of regret, it had also been filled with joy. Just how wonderful this had been she had never realized 'until this moment when it was threat-

ened with eclipse. How could Edmund think she meant that he had not made her happy?

Alice pushed open the door and stood arrested on the threshold. Edmund was getting his hat just as he always did when patients had to be visited directly after breakfast. His expression was forbidding. It did not seem as if she could find the courage to approach him now.

“Edmund,” she began tremulously—

“Well, what is it?”

“Edmund!” She came over and stood close to him, waiting for him to make some advance, but instead of that he said, “I’m in a great hurry; don’t keep me.” Then he went quickly out of the front door. It was the first time that he had ever left her without kissing her good-by.

As Edmund drove along the village street his thoughts traveled back to that after noon in the early days of their engagement, when he had first seen Madam Lancaster, and she had asked him if he thought he could make a girl with Alice’s intellectual and social tastes happy in a small New England town. Alice’s words produced the greater impression because she was, in general, so self-contained, and his resentment gradually gave place to pity. “Poor girl!” he thought, “how much she must have been keeping to herself to have said what she did to-day.” He deter-

mined that she should have a long visit in Boston in the winter.

It was such a new sensation for him to feel the intolerableness of life that he was only too glad to have his thoughts distracted, and he flung himself, heart and soul, into the needs of his patients. As he was coming down the mountain road from the Uphams', past the Howland farm, he saw Eloise Howland picking sweet peas. There were rows and rows of these lovely flowers, some a solid mass of white or pink, and others with pink and white, red, and all the shades of purple mixed in together.

Eloise, in a blue gingham gown with the butterflies flitting about her, seemed so full of youth and charm that Edmund's spirits rose, and for the moment he forgot his unhappiness.

"Dr. Ware!" the girl called out gayly. "Wait a moment, and I will make a buttonhole bouquet for you."

"You'd better save that up for one of the young fellows."

"I always think of you as young," said Eloise, as she began to make her bouquet.

"I am not young," and his words were weighted by the scene he had so recently gone through; "I am fifty, worse luck!"

"That is just the most interesting age. People begin to have a little sense and judgment by the time they are fifty."

"Do they?" he asked doubtfully.

"And they have so many interesting things to tell one."

A horn sounded, and Kate came out and begged the doctor to stay to dinner. He refused at first, but finally yielded, for what was there to go home to?

All through the lively meal Edmund talked and laughed with the gayest of them, although he had a subconscious feeling that there was something too terrible to be true that must be kept at bay.

"I thought you were fixed at Madam Lancaster's for life," he said to Eloise, as the dessert was brought on. "Peggy said she was so enthusiastic about you that I supposed you were equally satisfied."

Eloise looked down at her plate. "We did not understand each other," she replied briefly.

"I know she is a little hard to get on with, but Peggy seems to adore her in spite of that."

"I should if I were Peggy." Eloise paused. "It would not be fair for me to tell you just what the trouble was," she said with reserve, "for it might prejudice you against Madam Lancaster, and I should n't like to do that, but I will say just this, that it was n't my fault."

"I am sure of that," he agreed heartily. In his cooler moments he was not sure of anything of the kind, but Eloise was young and charming,

and it had been pleasant to be told that fifty is the age of good sense.

Eloise skillfully led up to the subject of her wanting another position in Boston, so that she could take a course at the Normal Art School without being a drag on her mother.

“I thought among your large circle of friends you might think of some one to whom I could be of use,” she continued. “Is it true that Mrs. Bates has serious trouble with her eyes?” she added with apparent irrelevance.

“Mrs. Bates? Oh, you mean my cousin Nancy. Yes, I am afraid it is, or at least she has the threatening of something serious. Fortunately, it’s a trouble that often can be cured, only she’ll have to give up using her eyes entirely for a time, and wear smoked glasses.”

Eloise seemed to have a sudden inspiration.

“I wonder—” she began, “but Mrs. Bates has so many friends I suppose she can easily find some one to read and write for her. I was wondering if perhaps she would like to have me for her secretary next winter. I’ve always admired her more than any woman I know. She was so sympathetic last spring when I used to tell her my troubles. I never told them to any one else; and she could understand just why I was unhappy, because she had lived with Madam Lancaster herself.”

"We can all understand that," Dr. Ware volunteered.

"Madam Lancaster is one of the finest women I have ever known," Eloise added, "and when you are full of faults, as I am, that in itself sometimes makes a strained relation. Mrs. Bates is so different; she is the best woman I know, and yet to hear her talk, you would think that she had a personal acquaintance with every fault."

Dr. Ware was pleased by the girl's appreciation of Nancy's character, but he shrank from the thought of her being dependent on Eloise; for his cousin was so precious that she ought to have the most loving service, and he was surer of Eloise's head than of her heart. If it had not been for Philip, he would have agreed to Nancy's proposition that Margaret should spend the winter with her, but he wanted to put a check on Philip's continual philandering. He was not going to have his daughter made love to while she was still a schoolgirl.

"I hear Mrs. Bates is going to be with Philip at Mount Desert until the last of August," said Eloise. "Would it be too much for me to ask you to see her when she comes back, and speak a good word for me? And then I can perhaps read and write for her while she is in Edgefield, even if she does n't want me in Boston. I am learning to use the typewriter this summer,

which will make me more valuable as an amanuensis."

"I will speak to her; it won't be any trouble."

When Dr. Ware drove away, he took with him a large basketful of pink and white sweet peas. Eloise knew by instinct that Mrs. Ware would prefer these unmixed with the purple variety.

As Edmund approached his own house the black mood that he had been keeping in the background suddenly overwhelmed him. He wished it were possible to slip quietly away and take the train for somewhere, anywhere, and so put an end to an intolerable situation; for to live under the same roof with a woman who no longer loves one with a perfect understanding, is to take from life its gracious charm. But instead of going away he must go home to supper, and they would sit opposite each other with the bowl of sweet peas between them, and Alice would treat him with perfect politeness and say how kind it was of Mrs. Howland to send her the sweet peas; then she would add that she was glad he had had a good dinner, she had been worrying about that. It had all happened with variations so many times before, and he, in his blindness, had thought how patient she was and how sweet-tempered; and every day, in all these many years, she had been secretly repining at her fate. His wife had always stood to him for unswerving loyalty and absolute truth, and now it seemed as

if there were no such things as loyalty and truth in the world.

Alice was at the window watching for him, and when he opened the front door, she came to meet him eagerly, as she used to do in the early days of their marriage. He thought he had never seen her look more beautiful, but he tried to steel his heart against her, for he felt that this softness was merely the prelude to a renewed appeal to him to do violence to his conscience.

“Edmund, please don’t look at me like that!” she begged. “I did n’t mean — how could you think I meant that you have not made me happy? It is the life here and the narrow, uninteresting people I have not cared for, but you —” her voice trembled, “I can’t tell you how I love you, you never will quite know, for you care for so many people; but you and Margaret make my whole life. Tell me you understand.”

In his revulsion of feeling the black cloud vanished and the world became flooded with light. As he took her in his arms he said, “Yes, I think I understand.”

CHAPTER XVII

A COUNTRY COUSIN

EDMUND was greatly touched by Alice's confession, and it was a comfort for him to be able to keep his old opinions concerning the perfections of her character. For a few days they returned to something of the romance and ardor of their early married life, but when Peggy came back from her visit, her father had an ungrateful feeling, that he was ashamed to acknowledge, of escape from a too intense situation; for Peggy was so human, and it was one of her graces that she always understood.

When she heard of the brilliant offer that her father had refused, she said, "I wish father wanted to give those lectures. It would be so jolly to have you both in Boston." But when he told her why he could not do it, she was satisfied.

"I know just how father feels," she said, "for I used to hate Boston, and he's too old to change."

"Too old!" her mother repeated, with a pang at the thought of their advancing years that spoiled the day for her.

"Yes, one does n't change much after fifty."

“Oh, my darling!” and Alice indulged in one of her rare caresses. “If you knew how I had set my heart on our all being together this winter, you would see why I am so unhappy on account of your father’s decision.”

Margaret had the impatience of youth with the inability of her elders to understand things that had always been clear to her.

“But mother, father is father,” she said. “If it is a matter that concerns one’s self, one just has to go ahead and pay no attention to what he says, and half the time he comes around, but if it is his affair, he always wants to manage in his own way. I shall have to come home very often to spend Sunday, and you must come down for a month or two, but don’t make poor father come.”

After Margaret’s Christmas vacation Alice went back with her for a long visit, and as Dr. Ware saw them off on the train, Margaret said, “Good-by, father dear, don’t on any account bore yourself by coming to Boston to see us,” and she gave him a glance that was so bewitching, that he determined to spend a Sunday with them as soon as he could.

Alice was to divide her time between her grandmother and her step-sister. She could not be entirely happy because she missed Edmund so much. She looked forward eagerly to his promised visit, but when he did join them, she had little satisfaction in it, for he passed most of

his leisure moments in skating with Margaret and Philip.

The time that Alice spent with her step-sister held still more serious drawbacks, for Eloise came several times a week to read and write for Nancy. Why Edmund had ever recommended such an intriguing girl, it passed her powers to understand, for he was usually so clear sighted. She could see that Nancy was not wholly at ease with her young secretary, and that she was beginning to be worried at the amount of attention that Philip paid her. He began by heartily disapproving of his mother's choice, which had been made while he was away in the Maine woods. He announced that it would be an awful bore to have Eloise around, and that he should be sure not to come home at the hours when she was there. By the middle of the winter, however, he had contracted the habit of frequently dropping in for afternoon tea. Eloise often stayed to pour it for Nancy, and then Philip, out of common politeness, had to walk back with her to her dingy little boarding-house.

Mrs. Ware was glad to see that his civility to Eloise did not interfere with his devotion to Margaret.

Alice's visit at Nancy's was to be succeeded by one from Sophia Baker. Sophia had not been in Boston for some years, and the mere prospect of staying with her dear cousin and being near

Delia, who was again at school in Boston and living with Madam Lancaster, put her in a flutter of happiness.

She had a new black satin gown made, and her mother gave her some of her old point lace to wear with it. Her lack of interest in dress had somewhat disturbed Gideon in the early days of their marriage, but he had long ago philosophically accepted the fact that since it was impossible to make her a woman with style, there was something refreshing in her unworldliness. One did not expect the latest fashion from Sophia any more than from one of the early saints. Nevertheless he was pleased with her looks in the black satin gown, and in her new Oxford gray suit. Sophia did not possess a rain coat, and her husband urged her to buy one in Boston, but she felt sure her old blue circular waterproof would answer perfectly well.

The day Sophia was packing, Marcia came down with the family fur-lined circular, which she was sure her sister would need when she went automobiling.

Gideon looked at it critically. "It seems to me the silk has grown rather shiny," he said, "and there are two or three moth holes in the collar."

"Mother and I have worn the circular for a good many years," Marcia replied tartly, as if that were a proof of its patent to nobility. "If it's good enough for us, it will be for Sophia."

It will keep her warm as nothing else will. You see how good the general effect is," and she threw the circular over her sister's shoulders.

Sophia was so much shorter than the others that it dragged on the ground, but this would make no difference when she was in the automobile, and she could hold it up if she wore it at other times.

Sophia was one of those happily constituted women who carry about with them such a genial atmosphere of content that they fail to notice the opposite mood in other people, and the fact that Philip was exceedingly particular, not only about his own dress, but also about his mother's, did not give Sophia any misgivings concerning her old blue waterproof. The fact remained, however, that when the Symphony concert chanced to come on a dull evening when it had begun to snow, and Philip had to go there with his mother and her guest, the sight of Cousin Sophia in this out-of-date garment was so disturbing to his peace of mind that he hastily proposed that they should take a carriage.

"Oh! no, indeed," Cousin Sophia protested cheerfully, "it is n't snowing hard, and this waterproof entirely protects my dress."

Philip was now a sophomore. He was in a rich and rather rapid set, and bore about with him an air of great distinction. While his aunt Alice was staying with them, Philip had been only too

glad to be her escort. She was one of the few older people in whom he took any interest. The world seemed to him to be made for the young, and his elders, having had their share of youth, must expect to get out of the road. Youth seemed to him like his own automobile: to have the imperative right of way, while age, like the bewildered pedestrian at the street crossing, must keep to the sidewalk, for, if he crossed the road, it was at his own peril.

Eloise once said that the only older men she had ever heard Philip say he should like to meet were the German emperor, Theodore Roosevelt, and Sargent, the artist; but he had added that he could give them all points.

It had always been a trial to Philip that his mother was plain. He loved her in his own way, but he patronized her and could not help wishing that she was not so abjectly devoted to him; for Philip was a planet to Nancy, and she was his faithful satellite. It was an unspeakable annoyance to him that she had to wear smoked glasses. It seemed as if Fate had taken a malicious pleasure in giving him the trials that disturbed him most. He was sorry for his mother, of course, although she did not seem to mind being conspicuous. He supposed one did not care how one looked when one got to be her age. Anything that was not normal was distressing to Philip; the blind, the halt, and the deaf found scant

sympathy from him, and he shunned the sick. On the other hand he took a corresponding delight in everything that was beautiful, and one of his most engaging characteristics was his great love for little children.

He had the grace to hide his sulkiness while he was taking his relatives across Arlington Street to the car. As they were making their way up the steps of Symphony Hall, Philip in the middle, Cousin Sophia, in the limp blue waterproof, clinging to one arm, for she had been timid ever since falling on the ice, and his mother, who could not see very well through her smoked glasses, dragging on the other, Philip chanced to meet some of his most fashionable acquaintances. Eloise passed him, too. She was with a gay party, and she threw him a glance of mingled amusement and commiseration that set his blood boiling.

Sophia Baker had an absolutely delightful evening, but Philip made up his mind that he would never go anywhere with her again.

Nancy found that one of the things Sophia was most anxious to see was the Lifeorama. "I wish you could arrange to take Cousin Sophia Friday evening," she said to Philip, "for those moving pictures hurt my eyes so much that I must n't try to go, and she has set her heart on it. I thought it would be pleasant to have a little party of four, and ask Peggy and Delia."

This inducement, however, was not sufficient to make Philip change his determination. "The Lifeorama is a cheap, second-rate show," he said, "and anyway I have an engagement for Friday evening."

"Your cousin Sophia wants so much to go. If you can't take them Friday evening, how about Thursday?"

"I have an engagement for every night this week," said Philip, conclusively.

"Very well, dear, then I'll telephone for the tickets; I won't trouble you."

It occurred to Nancy that "poor old Richard," as his sister called him, could be counted upon to go with his aunt Sophia and the girls to see the moving pictures. It was not the first time that he had been called upon to take up the burdens dropped by Philip or Lawrence, but he had never before had a task so congenial.

When the eventful evening came, it was sprinkling a little, but his aunt Sophia's blue waterproof did not disturb Richard, and as she clung to his arm while Delia and Margaret walked on in front, he had a feeling of benign content.

Richard had long ago discovered that there were certain persons whose mere presence turned a commonplace evening into a scene of joyful excitement. There were only a few of them, but Margaret Ware was one. His admiration for her mother would have touched Alice if she had

known of it, for quite unconsciously she had been the means of setting a high standard, which for many years he had been trying to reach. She stood to him for the perfect flower of womanhood. Ever since that morning at sunrise, however, Margaret had taken a place beside her mother, until the two figures had blended like a composite photograph, and he thought of them both as belonging to an ideal world from which he was shut out, but which he hoped some time to qualify himself to enter. This last winter Mrs. Ware's image had been less distinct in his mind, and Margaret's more clear.

It was a bit of good fortune that sent the blood coursing more swiftly in his veins, that Margaret sat next him at the Lifeorama. Delia was on her other side, next to her mother, and mother and daughter were so beatifically happy at being together that this in itself shed a light of festivity over the whole party.

Sophia Baker's absorption in the moving pictures, which were a novelty to her, was interesting to the three more sophisticated young people, who felt as if they had taken a child to the pantomime. Mrs. Baker looked with breathless interest at a set of scenes entitled "The Detective Story." A young girl bought an exciting volume at a bookstall and began to read it as she walked down the street.

"Oh! she's going to get run over!" Aunt

Sophia exclaimed, and it was all she could do to keep from crying out, as a heavy steam roller went over the prostrate body of the girl.

“They ought n’t to have such terrible things!” The next moment the young lady rose blithely and pursued her way down the street with her eyes glued to the open book in her hand. Adventure after adventure, each more harrowing than the last, succeeded one another, and at the end of the episode the heroine was safely housed, reading her detective story at the window.

The sardine fisheries interested Sophia Baker still more, for this was real life, and the surging, tossing waves as they broke into foam against the rocks caused her to press Delia’s hand, as she cried enthusiastically, “My dear, that’s the real ocean. How can they do such wonderful things?”

Later in the evening, in one of the pauses between the pictures, Margaret said she was getting very hungry and proposed that they should go to the Touraine for supper. Delia joyfully seconded this motion, but Richard looked embarrassed, and said he was afraid he had not money enough with him.

“Oh, I did n’t mean you were to pay for us,” Margaret explained; “we ’ll all chip in.”

“No,” said Aunt Sophia, “it is up to me to treat you all.”

The three young people laughed merrily. Mrs.

Baker could never use a slang expression without producing this effect.

When the show was at last over and they went out into the dark street, the sudden drop to real life was accentuated by the fact that it was now blowing a gale, and raining torrents. It was then that Sophia Baker felt the full value of her waterproof; the stanch and tried friend of many years, which had not been made with an eye to show, but for real service.

They decided not to go to the Touraine, but to a more plebeian restaurant nearer at hand. As they went around into a side street, the wind took their umbrellas. Richard's was turned inside out, and two of the spokes were broken. They were glad that they had not selected the Touraine as the scene of their festivity, for a more bedraggled-looking party had seldom entered a restaurant. Mrs. Baker outshone the others, for her toque had slipped down over one ear and the wings were blown out of place, giving her a most rakish appearance, while her waterproof was in such a condition that little rivulets descended on the restaurant floor. Richard carried his wrecked umbrella imperturbably, untroubled by the covert smiles on the faces of the waiters. Any one with common sense would know what had happened, so why care?

Mrs. Baker decided to go to the munificent length of ordering oysters, chocolate, and ice

cream for the party. They had such a merry time that they lingered over the meal, for such evenings had not often come to Mrs. Baker.

"How your father would enjoy this," she said to Delia, but Delia was not so sure.

They were just finishing their ice cream, when the restaurant was suddenly flooded with an influx of late comers from the theatres; and, among a noisy group of students, Margaret recognized Philip and Lawrence. They seated themselves with two other fellows at a table some distance from theirs; Lawrence had his back to them and Philip sat at his left; apparently he did not see them.

"Richard!" Margaret cried excitedly, "there are Philip and Lawrence. Do make them look at us."

"I don't think they will care to see us," Richard returned shortly.

It was evidently "up to Philip," as Mrs. Baker would have said, to treat the others, for he was ordering the waiter about in a lordly way, who presently brought them a tray loaded with bottles and glasses.

Margaret watched the lively party with growing disapproval. She had not realized that this was the sort of thing that meant a good time to her cousin. He had preferred going to the theatre with these loud-voiced fellows to taking his aunt and cousins to the Lifeorama.

"I think we had better be going now," Richard said abruptly, as he heard his brother's voice raised high above the others.

He rose to help his aunt Sophia on with her waterproof and knocked down his umbrella. As it lay on the floor in all its shattered majesty, a titter went around the room, and the four young men looked up. One of the strangers stared hard at Margaret in a way that made her wish hotly that she was as inconspicuous-looking as Delia. He turned to Philip, and made some remark about her that she judged was complimentary, and then said something that was evidently disparaging concerning her companions, for the man next him laughed unpleasantly.

"Bless my soul! It 's Peggy Ware," Lawrence exclaimed.

Philip glanced at the party without any sign of recognition, and Margaret, very sore and angry, looked at him for half a moment as if she had never seen him before, and then turned to follow her aunt who had not seen the party.

Margaret was thinking that she could never, never, never forgive Philip for being ashamed of them; no, not if he begged her on bended knees to forgive him, and then just as she had reached the door, her wrath was suddenly checked by Philip's appearance.

"I hope you have enjoyed the evening," he said to his cousin Sophia.

"Why, Philip, where did you come from?" she asked joyfully. "We have had a wonderful evening. My only regret was that you missed the fun; but perhaps you have been having just as good a time."

"Philip has been having his own kind of good time," Margaret said.

"Peggy Ware, I'll get even with you for that," he said, so low that no one else could hear him. "I am coming for you to go to walk to-morrow afternoon."

"I am so sorry, but I shall have to study."

"Then I'll come and help you study. I wish I could see you home now, but these fellows are my guests."

"Richard is taking beautiful care of us, so we don't need you."

Margaret knew that there were certain things she must say sooner or later to her cousin, and she felt that she might as well do it before her anger died away, so she did go to walk with him the next afternoon. They went through the Fenway, where the trees were a mass of glittering ice, for the rain had turned to sleet in the night, and the sky had cleared in the morning and was now a cloudless blue. They were too absorbed, however, to take more than a casual notice of the beauty of the landscape.

"That was an amiable, genial look you gave me last night, Miss Margaret Ware," he began after

they had been talking for a time about trivial things.

"It at least seemed to produce the effect of making you remember who I was."

"Now you need n't get into a state of mind over that. Honestly, I did n't see you at first, and when I did, I thought it was easier to let it go at that. We were n't an especially creditable crowd, I admit, and I thought if Cousin Sophia saw us, she would be shocked, for she thinks cold water is the perfect drink."

"That was n't all you thought. You were ashamed of us," she said hotly.

"Not of you, Peggy; I was proud of you."

"You were ashamed of dear Aunt Sophia who is good enough to make three of you and me with remnants left over."

"If we were made out of her, should we have to wear her clothes? Because I draw the line at her waterproof."

"Now please do be serious. I am in dead earnest. You were ashamed of Richard, too, whose shoes you are not good enough to black."

"I admit they need it badly, but I don't covet the job."

"You think you are very funny, but I am going to say a lot of things to you. Some one must say them, and as your mother does n't, I 've got to."

"All right, sail into me, Peggy; I give you leave to say any old thing you like."

She accepted this invitation with the courage of her seventeen years. It would have seemed to her both disloyal and insincere to keep her thoughts to herself. Before the walk was over she felt she had said enough unpleasant things to make an enemy of Philip; he did not seem to resent her words, however, but listened in silence as she made one charge after another. When she stopped, he said in a low voice, "and it's all true; that's the worst of it."

She caught her breath and felt that her sense of being loyal and courageous had been purchased at too high a price.

"It is n't all true. You know it is n't. I said to Eloise when she told me those things that you were not responsible for Lawrence. Why should you be? I told her I was as sure you had nothing to do with Lawrence's getting into debt and drinking as I could be of anything; and then when I saw you last night — I thought — I was angry and disappointed in you; but you don't really like that sort of good time, I know you don't."

"I expect I like almost any sort of a good time that comes along, if you want the whole truth; there are different grades. I don't like that kind better than walking here with you; but if you expect me to give up every kind of a good time except the ones you approve of, you'll have a mighty hard job on your hands, unless

you are going to promise me a reward that will make it pay."

Margaret thought it best to ignore the true significance of this remark.

"I think the happiest people are the ones that get their pleasure out of the really interesting things," she observed sagely. "You have your reward as you go along."

"Do you? Suppose I were to agree to make Lawrence study hard, — that's a nice, easy job, — and use my great influence that you are so pleased to talk about in keeping him out of mischief, and suppose I were to agree to live exclusively on Cousin Sophia's favorite drink, and chuck my cigarettes over the nearest wall — I believe you mentioned a few more things, but I can't think of them all — what do you propose to do next? When you've got me on a diet of bread and water and absorbed in simple joys like the sunrise and Shakespeare — I take it that's your idea of the intellectual life — will you promise to fulfil your old contract?"

"What do you mean?"

"Will you keep house for me as soon as I am out of college?"

"What nonsense you talk! I was eight years old when I made that rash promise."

"Oh, you adorable Peggy!" and he seized her hand.

She drew it away hastily. "Stop, Philip. I won't have it. I am not a little girl any more."

"No, worse luck! I wish you were. You were angelic to me when you were a kid. I remember how you dashed up to me one day and threw your arms around my neck and I was as cold as a fish. Father said I'd better be properly grateful, for I'd never get any one to care more for me, not even a wife. And now you don't take any more interest in me than in the ice under your feet."

"I do care for you a lot. If I did n't, do you suppose I would have said so many hateful things?"

"But you don't care a bit in the way I want you to. Ten to one if I were to flatten myself out for you to walk over, you'd walk away in the other direction."

Peggy looked thoughtful. "I might," she owned.

When she went up to her room late that afternoon, she was so grave that Delia asked her if she were not feeling well.

"I'm all right," she answered, and she began to pore over her German grammar with such unusual devotion that Delia knew she did not want to answer any questions.

Philip had said many things on their homeward way that had left her with a sense that the beautiful world was jarred and out of tune.

Delia bore the silence as long as she could. Then she asked softly, "Has Philip been bothering you again? When he makes you look like that, I feel as if I should like to wring his wretched neck."

"You can wring it if you like," Peggy said briefly.

CHAPTER XVIII

FROM FOUR TO SEVEN

MARGARET stood before the cheval-glass in her old room at Madam Lancaster's, looking at herself with frank pleasure, while her chiffon-and-satin waist was being fastened by her mother, and Delia was giving one or two last touches to her hair. Margaret could hardly believe that the tall, distinguished-looking young person in this beautiful white gown with the long train was really little Peggy Ware, who had so hated to grow up. It was three years since that winter day when she and Philip had that serious talk that made them both so unhappy. The intervening time had brought them nearer to each other, for it had steadied him and had made her less intolerant. Most people, including Philip himself, were sure that he and Margaret would be married when they were a little older; she meant to forget this possibility, as well as all her other perplexities and worries, and fling herself, heart and soul, into the gay life that awaited her.

Madam Lancaster was now so old and feeble that Alice thought it might be her last chance of seeing her, and she was sure that Margaret's winter in society would be a very different thing if she were on the spot to chaperon her, for her

great-grandmother could not do it, and her aunt Nancy liked people too easily to have much discrimination. Alice decided to spend the four winter months in Boston, only going back to Edgefield for an occasional week with Edmund. She believed that she saw him at last without illusions, and while the music of his voice and the charm of his personality would always powerfully sway her, she did not consider it fair to herself to spend the whole year in a small country town, which he was now in a position to leave if he chose. She had learned that his inclinations were his conscience.

Margaret's father said many severe things concerning the whole wretched system by which night was turned into day, and all sensible, hard-working men were crowded out of society, but her mother felt that Margaret ought to have at least one winter of the life that was her birth-right, and as usual where his child was concerned Dr. Ware yielded in the end, although not until Margaret had spent a year in Edgefield.

That year at home had begun most delightfully. She was glad to be with her father and mother, and the freedom of being out of school greatly appealed to her. As time went on, however, she began to miss her cousin Delia, who was in Boston studying to be a trained nurse, and although Margaret said to herself that it was a relief to get away from Philip, there was a cer-

tain flatness in life when she did not have to parry his often renewed attempts at love-making. She missed Richard, too, and even Eloise, who always brought a dramatic touch into life. Lawrence was the only member of the group whom she was glad not to see, and then, with the perversity of fate, in the late winter he appeared in Edgefield, having been suspended, because, to quote his own words, he was unlucky enough to be a scapegoat for some other fellows who deserved punishment much more than he did. He had "no more use for Harvard," as he expressed it. Neither did he mean "to hang around Edgefield, helping his father on the farm; he did not hold himself so cheap as that."

The three years that had brought Philip and Margaret nearer together had separated Philip and Lawrence, for young Howland, having begun with a desire to copy Philip in all things, had ended by going much farther than his model, and Philip after a few attempts to drag him back had abandoned the uncongenial task.

Lawrence was a bold-looking young fellow with a kind of dashing beauty. He always wore clothes that were in the latest fashion, but they were so pronounced that they heightened the striking effect of his red hair and china-blue eyes. His career in college, besides getting him deeply into debt, had increased the natural conceit of his manners, which were now so aggressive

that his quieter townsmen remarked that he had a swelled head. On the other hand, his high spirits appealed to a certain class, while the more frivolous of the young women in a grade of society below his own were greatly impressed with his looks and ways. As he had a large amount of time on his hands he proceeded to honor Margaret Ware with his attentions. She disliked him too much to accept any of his numerous invitations, but she was so afraid of hurting his feelings that she refused them in such a gentle way that he was sure she regretted her previous engagements as much as he did. When he called to see Margaret, her mother was always present, "throwing a kind of polar-expedition-atmosphere around the room," as he afterwards told Eloise, so he finally tried to meet her at other places.

His aunt Sophia, who was sorry for him, was touched by his devotion to herself. "His coming here so often to see us," she said to Gideon, "shows that he has a good heart. I never believed half those stories against him."

The astute Gideon suspected his motive, but he did not enlighten Sophia: faith like hers deserved to remain intact.

At last Lawrence's pursuit was rewarded one evening by his finding Margaret and his aunt Sophia sitting together deep in the mysteries of a new game of solitaire. His uncle Gideon was out, another fortunate circumstance, so when it

was time for Margaret to go home, Lawrence would not let his aunt send the maid with her, for he said he had an errand in the village and was going directly past her house. That walk seemed like a nightmare to the girl whenever she thought of it, and was one of the unpleasant things that this happy winter was to make her forget.

Afterwards, as she sat on the hearth-rug, her face buried in her mother's lap, she felt a sense of personal humiliation that amounted almost to sickness.

"How could he think I cared for him? How could he?" she asked. "*I, care for him!* And he said I had led him on! For years I have loathed the sight of him; and he had the audacity to want to marry me!" She raised her head again. "He thought I would n't be engaged to Philip because I was in love with him."

It was intolerable to Alice to think that her lovely, her exquisite daughter should have had to go through such an experience. She had tried to shield her so carefully and to guard her from undesirable acquaintances, and in spite of all her planning this unbelievable thing had happened.

But almost a year had passed since then, and now, as Mrs. Ware watched Margaret's radiant face, she was glad that she took life so lightly, for she looked as if she had never known an anxiety.

Cards had been sent far and wide with Madam Lancaster's name on them together with those of Mrs. Ware and Miss Ware, for the three were to be at home on this December afternoon from four until seven. It had been a day of joyful excitement to Margaret, for early in the morning boxes of flowers began to come. Philip sent her a sheaf of pink roses; there were so many of them and their stems were so long, that she found it hard to hold them.

As her mother was clasping a gold chain around Margaret's neck with a pendant of pearls encircling a pink topaz, the maid brought in another box.

"This came late last night, miss, and it was put away and got overlooked."

"I'll undo it for you," said Delia, "I am so afraid you will hurt your dress."

Margaret stood by impatiently as her cousin deliberately untied the knots. The direction was neatly printed.

"It is n't flowers, after all," said Delia, as she found nothing inside but evergreen and fir-balsam. "Who could have sent it to you? There is n't any card," she went on, as she hunted through the box. "What can we do with it? Look out, you'll get the pitch all over yourself. I suppose it must have come from some one in Edgefield, and she expects you to decorate the chandeliers."

"You can arrange the fir-balsam in one of those big Japanese bowls," Margaret said, "and trim the mantelpiece with the evergreen. It will just shade in with the dining-room paper. Break off a small sprig of the balsam, please, and fasten it in with my roses. If I ever find out who sent it to me, I shall be glad to tell them that I put it with the flowers I carried."

Margaret knew who had sent it, and the knowledge increased her feeling of joyous exhilaration. In all the years that had passed since that talk at sunrise with Richard, he had never once alluded to it, and they had never had another that was so intimate; indeed, she sometimes thought he no longer liked her, and when they had met in the summer, she felt sure by his manner that he had heard Lawrence's story, and that he thoroughly disapproved of her. She had believed that Richard had no more sympathy with a girl's "coming out" than her father had, and here was this fragrant thing to show that however disappointed he was in her, he still remembered. She was taken back to the early morning when the only thing worth having seemed the joyous out-of-door life, which brought one so close to the realities, and when Richard's description of the world as a place to fight in made Philip's life of ease seem mere self-indulgence. She realized sharply how the years had changed her, for she had learned the fascination of the other sort of life.

As she stood with her great-grandmother and her mother in the drawing-room, shaking hands with hundreds of guests, she felt that all that was needed to complete the triumph of this wonderful day was to have Richard come up and say the pleasant words that all her other friends were saying; but Richard was now his uncle Gideon's assistant in Edgefield.

Philip could not keep away from her for five minutes. He made so many flattering remarks about her looks that she felt her head would have been completely turned if she had not known it was just Philip's way. When he saw that she was wearing his pendant and carrying his roses, he gave her such a tender glance that she felt obliged to say, "I wanted to make up a bouquet with a sample of all the different flowers that were sent me. That would have been so much fairer to everybody, but I was afraid it would look rather queer."

Whenever Margaret was having a particularly pleasant talk with some young man in the early hours of the reception before the crowd came, Philip was sure to come over and join in the conversation. It seemed as if he could not let her amuse herself with any one else. Soon, however, every corner of the house was taken possession of by a horde of chattering women and a lesser proportion of men.

When the crowd was the greatest, Richard

Howland elbowed his way up the stairs. He cared much more about his appearance than he had done a few years before, and in these days even the critical Eloise was fairly well satisfied with his clothes. In his shabbiest and most taciturn days there had been something about him which had given people the feeling that he would some day be a man of mark. He was the plainest of the family, and yet, although Eloise was fonder of Lawrence, she could not but be proud of Richard.

It had not occurred to him that there would be such a crowd, and when he found that Margaret was hemmed in by guests who lingered to talk to her with entire disregard for those who were behind them, he made up his mind that he would not try to speak to her, but would stand where he could watch her.

The three generations of women formed a remarkable group. Madam Lancaster sat in her carved oak-chair, a noteworthy figure in her severely simple black satin gown, her snowy hair crowning a face that was still beautiful in spite of her eighty-eight years; next her stood Mrs. Ware in a pale gray dress: the years had left very little mark on her face, and she still had as slight and graceful a figure as when Richard had first seen her; and beyond her was that sunny-haired, radiant creature in white. Any one who loved Margaret would certainly have no dread

of the inroads of advancing years when he saw her with her mother and her great-grandmother; for it seemed as harmonious a process for youth to turn into middle life and age, as for a happy morning to change into the gray of twilight and the black of night.

As Richard watched Margaret giving the same cordial greeting to each man who came up to her, he was seized by such fierce displeasure that it was the strongest emotion he had ever known. He hastily turned to make his way out of this stifling room. It had come over him with a force that was bewildering in its certainty that it would mean misery to him if she were to love any one else. And she loved the whole world! He remembered her as she had stood on that summer morning, throwing out her hands and saying, "I love life!" The sweetness she had shown to him was merely what she accorded to every one who was part of the great pageant. Lawrence had mistaken her kindness for love, but he himself was a wise man. As he turned to go out of the room, Eloise caught sight of him.

"Why, Richard Howland, what on earth brought you here?" she asked.

"I had to come down to Boston for various things and I thought I'd just look in for a minute, but there is such a jam I am not going to try to make my way up to Madam Lancaster," he answered in a bored voice.

“How foolish! Of course you’ll stay! The crowd will thin out soon. Delia is over there by the piano; you can be talking to her.”

A little later Margaret discovered Richard.

“Why, there’s Richard Howland,” she said to Philip. “Go and get him and bring him over to see us.”

As Richard stood talking to Madam Lancaster, the woman of the world felt as if the strong north wind had suddenly swept into her overcrowded drawing-room. She wished that his manners were more polished, and yet she felt as if his good opinion would be worth having.

He passed on to Mrs. Ware, who tried to be cordial but failed, for her dislike of Lawrence had given her a distaste for his brother. A moment later he was shaking hands with Margaret.

“How good of you to come,” she said. She saw that his face was very grave and set, and that he looked pale.

“I came to Boston to buy a horse,” he returned harshly.

Margaret’s pleasure in the sight of him was momentarily dashed, but she quickly recovered herself.

“I’m glad you did n’t have to buy him this afternoon,” she said.

He threw his head back and laughed as heartily as he used to do when he was a boy. “I’d have been much more where I belong. I

always feel like a fish out of water in a jam like this."

"Do you? I adore it always; but it's twice as much fun when it's your own particular jam."

While she was speaking, he was looking at her roses, and thinking what a fool he had been to send her the fir-balsam; he might have realized that she had grown beyond all care for a thing like that. At this point, Margaret saw that Philip was coming up with a young man who was a stranger to her.

"I want to thank you," she began hastily, "for one of the nicest things I had. You must get Delia to take you out to the dining-room, and show you the fir-balsam and evergreen."

Richard's face cleared perceptibly. "If I had known you were going to have such a lot of flowers, I would n't have sent you those green things; but I thought perhaps you would like them just as you used to when you were a little girl."

"If growing up means not caring for the things I have liked once, I shall always be a child," she said.

Philip had come up and was pronouncing the stranger's name in Margaret's ear. She turned to speak to him and at the same time lifted her roses, so that Richard could see the sprig of fir-balsam.

CHAPTER XIX

MAY IN EDGEFIELD

THAT winter in Boston was the most brilliant which Alice had ever known. She was almost in as much demand as her young daughter, and enjoyed herself far more than in the days of her reserved youth. It was a season of extreme cold, and Edgefield was buried in snow. Edmund's mother was shut in as usual with bronchitis, and he contrived to go to see her almost every day, generally taking a meal there, so Alice felt that she should see very little of him if she were at home.

There was an unusual amount of sickness in Edgefield, and the doctors were kept busy. Edmund had given over the hardest of his work to Jack Murray, and Gideon Baker was more than glad to be reënforced by Richard Howland, who was strong and young, and never minded taking a ten-mile drive in a snow-storm, or sitting up all night with a pneumonia patient. Edmund sometimes met Richard at the Edgefield House, where they both had patients, and the sight of him gave the older man a pang of envy, for Richard was at the point of life where middle age seems as remote as death. There was something, too, in the way

in which he grudged no amount of personal discomfort, if the patient's welfare were in question, that made Dr. Ware think of the ideals of his youth. He felt protecting pity when he saw this fine young fellow wasting his powers so recklessly on the poor and suffering. Life is hard on ideals, and he believed that at fifty Richard would be sitting comfortably before his fire, reading his books, and turning over the hardest of his work to a younger man.

Dr. Ware never went into the Edgefield House to see his patient, old Mrs. Griffith, without a lively curiosity as to its management, for there were rumors that Dr. Baker's money was made in a large part from the sale of liquor. The house had been "The Edgefield Inn" only two seasons, for its neighborhood to the mills almost immediately affected its class of boarders, and finally, one dark night, some adventurous spirit, presumably at the instigation of Jerry McKnight, took down the new sign and replaced it by one bearing the old inscription, "The Edgefield House." Dr. Ware saw that Gus Leggett had more and more to do with the management, for the new landlord, who was a patient of Gideon's, had become crippled by rheumatism.

Gus's daughters, who were now in their teens, were always flashily dressed and very much in evidence. Madge, the eldest, was in the hotel office, and Celestine, who was the prettiest and

the quietest, was often there helping her sister; while Viola Mary, who was a high school girl, was addicted to playing the banjo in her leisure moments. Dr. Ware liked to see their bright, young faces, although he did not at all approve of the way they had been brought up. He seldom passed Gus without having a tilt of words with him, for to his surprise Gus always took everything he said as a personal insult: for instance, when he missed Celestine's bright face and asked where she was, her father flew into a rage and said, "It's no concern of yours, damn you."

Afterwards Dr. Ware learned that Celestine had gone on the stage. He was sorry, for she deserved a happier fate. In the summer he had often seen Lawrence Howland hanging around the hotel, sometimes in an excited condition and with a flushed face, but in the autumn Lawrence went to New York. This was why Richard had come back, for his father and mother were far from strong and some one must be with them. Lawrence was always more trouble than help when he was at home, for he insisted upon having all the delicacies of the season; and Eloise frankly stated that she did not think it right to sacrifice her life; she had talents that must be cultivated. So Richard, whose talents, fortunately for his family, were of the kind that flourish in any place, returned to Edgefield. When he heard through Eloise's letters of Mar-

garet's gay winter with its succession of dances, theatre parties, and dinners, and of Philip's devotion, he ground his teeth and vowed that his profession should be his wife.

When Mrs. Ware and Margaret came home in the spring, they found to their surprise that Dr. Ware and Richard had become the closest friends, and that the younger man had been in the habit of often taking a meal with his senior; but upon their return he dropped out of the doctor's home life as completely as if he had never entered it.

"He's a shy fellow, he does n't care for ladies' society," Edmund said, "and I imagine, Alice, from a hint he dropped, that he thinks you would n't care to have him round."

"I have always liked him, but I don't think any Howland is a desirable friend for Margaret."

"Richard is the salt of the earth. He is a great deal better friend for her than those fools who were hanging around her in Boston."

"I am sure Richard is a good fellow, but I was thinking of his bringing up. You forget that Margaret is a woman grown," she added, "and men are so apt to fall in love with her. I don't want to encourage a man's coming to the house in an intimate way, who would be out of the question for her to marry."

"To marry! I should hope not. I was n't thinking of anything of that sort. The best man is not good enough for her."

Richard would have agreed with Margaret's father, but whenever he had a glimpse of her, his resolution to keep out of her way weakened, and he said to himself that he was at least far better able to make her happy than Philip was. And then one memorable day he chanced to meet her.

Margaret and her father had been spending the afternoon in planting potatoes at her own little farm which she had bought with some of the money that her uncle Joe left her. The farm was halfway up Howland's Hill, a mile beyond the Howland farm, and had originally been part of the Uphams' land.

This farm was another of Edmund's interests that divided him from Alice. She did not appreciate the charms of the rude little log camp that he helped to build with his own hands. Margaret and her father, in their unpractical way, had fallen in love with the rocky, hillside pasture and the cinnamon roses that grew in front of the stone cellar that marked the site of a former house.

Alice in vain pointed out that if a farm was what they wanted, it would be better to get one in the valley, but they replied that it was the view and the glorious air that appealed to them most. Alice gave way at last, hoping that the hours spent out of doors by Edmund would be good for his health; but she saw with regret that

he was working too hard, and that the farm was becoming such an absorbing interest that it was likely to interfere with his practice.

Margaret was so happy in the freedom of the simple out-of-door life that she wondered how she could have stayed so contentedly in Boston.

When their work for the day was over, they took a short cut across the Howlands' land, and came upon Richard and his father who were planting potatoes. They looked tired and worn, and Margaret was filled with compassion for them. She and her father had been playing at work, while these others were trying to wrest a living from the unwilling soil, and seemed too absorbed to have time to give any thought to the glory of the spring. The field was edged with apple trees in full blossom, and the unploughed land was dotted with blue violets and dandelions; while in the distance a golden robin gave expression to Margaret's feelings by singing his heart out in a wild burst of joy.

Richard had last seen Margaret face to face as she stood in Madam Lancaster's drawing-room on the afternoon of her reception. Then she had seemed hedged about by an array of conventionalities that put her in a different world from his; but to-day, in this rocky field, she was once again the Margaret whom he had known as a child. The trailing white gown had been exchanged for an old blue serge skirt and a white sweater, while

her fair hair had been loosened by her unusual exercise, and the wind had given her cheeks an added glow.

Richard had resolved to keep out of her way, yet he could not but give her a cordial greeting when she stopped to speak to him. His matter-of-fact life was suddenly changed to one of absorbing interest, and the rough New England pasture took on a poetic charm.

"Why don't you ever come to see us?" she inquired with her usual directness.

Richard looked embarrassed. He stopped to cover over a potato and then leaned on the handle of his hoe.

"I've been very, very busy," he replied; "there is so much planting to do in the spring, and I don't get much time even for that, now I am Uncle Gideon's assistant."

Margaret did not remind him that he had often found time to go to see her father while she and her mother were away. She was silent for a minute, then she pulled down the branch of an apple tree that was fragrant with pink-and-white blossoms and buried her face in them.

"Did you ever know anything so delicious?" she asked. "I am almost crazy with delight at getting back to where I can live out of doors."

"Do you feel like that?" he said slowly. "I should think you would miss all the good times you had."

"I did have a perfectly beautiful time; but I hate the city in spring."

Edmund and Andrew were talking about the crops. Richard had a feeling of commiseration for them. It seemed hard to have reached the period of life when such topics are of paramount importance.

"May I have some apple blossoms?" Margaret asked.

"Yes, all you want. I'll break off some branches for you."

"Peggy, we ought to be going," said her father. "Look here, child, you don't seem to realize that you are planning to run off with half a bushel of future Baldwins. Don't spoil her like that. Can't you look in on us some evening, Richard?"

"Oh, please do," Margaret begged, and [her eyes were very eloquent.

Richard hesitated. Then he answered, "I'll come to-morrow night."

The next evening Margaret put on one of her white muslin frocks cut down a little in the neck, and clasped her gold chain with Philip's pendant on it around her throat.

Soon after seven o'clock the clouds that had been in the sky all day came down in the form of a pelting shower, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Margaret was sure that Richard was not the sort of man to be kept at home by a

storm, and she prepared to give him a cordial welcome. At eight o'clock, however, there was still no sign of him, nor any message from him. Perhaps he had been called away by a patient, but in that case, why had he not telephoned to her? Perhaps—humiliating thought—he had forgotten his promise.

When it was so late that there was no possibility of his coming, the keenness of her disappointment showed her how little excitement there was in Edgefield.

She was sure he would come the next evening with some explanation, and so she again made ready for him. Her father and mother were going to a bridge party, and Margaret was glad that she should have Richard all to herself.

A little after eight o'clock, the doorbell rang, and she went quickly out into the hall with a welcoming smile and an outstretched hand.

"Why, Peggy, how did you know I was coming?" asked Philip.

"I did n't, but I am very glad to see you."

"You were expecting some one else then," he said jealously.

"Only Richard, and I'm not sure that he's coming." She thought he might walk in at any moment, and so it was just as well to explain.

"So that's the sort of a welcome you give Richard! You never look so glad to see me. I came all the way from Boston on purpose to see

you, and you don't care a hang whether I am here or not."

"You know I do care."

"What I have come for is to say I can't stand your playing fast and loose with me the way you have been doing lately. I want our engagement to come out."

"Our engagement! But I am not engaged to you!"

"I consider it the same thing. You as good as promised that if I would leave undone all those things that I ought not to do, and do all those things that I ought to do, you would marry me."

"I don't see but what you do just as you please."

"You know that is n't true. I've slowed up on a lot of things to please you. You pulled me out of a hole three years ago, and although I may have got on the edge of it, I have never gone in again. If you knew how I cared about you and how I have been pestered lately, you would have some sympathy. You don't know what the world is like, little girl, and I am glad you don't. You don't know the attraction that a lot of money has. I sometimes feel as if I would like to chuck it all into the sea; it makes girls so awfully pleasant to me, confound them."

Margaret looked at her handsome cousin and she was not so sure if he were to dispose of his

fortune that the girls would become indifferent to him.

"There 's another thing that makes me raging mad whenever it happens," he went on, "and that 's the way that any kind of a thing in trousers thinks he has the right to make love to you."

Margaret gave a low laugh. "It 's a pity we are both so fascinating," she said.

"You need n't make fun of me in that irritating way, I am in earnest. There 's something that 's bothering me, and I want your advice."

"What 's the matter?"

"It 's Eloise. If I did n't find her all ready for me at Dedham, when I went to spend the week end at the Bradshaws', and she made it seem as if I had gone there on purpose to see her. Of course I had to take her canoeing."

"I don't see why, unless you wanted to. You find it easy enough not to do the things I ask you to do, if it does n't happen to be convenient."

"That 's different. You always ask me point blank and we are in the habit of telling the truth to each other, but Eloise never asks for things, she just insinuates, and before you know what 's happening, you find yourself alone in a canoe with her. Then, after we both got back to Boston, of course I had to go to see her, at her boarding-house. Well, the long and the short of it is, I just gave a sigh of relief when she was called home by her mother's illness."

"Yet I am sure you missed her."

"Margaret, you're a very Machiavelli for digging up everything a fellow has in his mind. She's like the cigarette habit; you know it is n't good for you, and yet it's so stimulating, there is a kind of void when you let up on it. I thought, 'Well, now I'll have a little peace,' and I found to have peace was to be deadly dull. But I felt quite safe and comfortable, and then, if you'll believe it, she began to write to me. I was fool enough to lend her a book to read on the train. It was only a paper-covered novel, and I told her she need n't bother to send it back, but she did just the same with marked passages and a letter four pages long telling what she thought of it; and she contrived to end it in such a way that I felt as you do in a serial story, as if I had just got to have another to know what she was going to say when her mother called her off. I had to answer it out of common politeness. Well, the long and short of it is, she has kept on writing. I have brought the letters to show you, there are six of them. I was sure she would tell you we were corresponding, and I wondered what on earth you would think."

"She did n't tell me, but if she had, I should have thought it was very natural, and just what I should have expected."

"You have a flattering opinion of my constancy, Peggy Ware." He was spreading the

letters out. "This is number one," he said, holding up a neatly written sheet of tinted paper.

"But I ought n't to read Eloise's letters to you."

"But I want you to; you can't get any idea of the situation unless you do."

When Margaret had finished reading the six letters, her admiration for Eloise's cleverness and literary skill was so great that it was only surpassed by the sense of her own incompetence to deal with the situation.

"She is very clever," was her brief comment, as she handed the letters back to him.

"Oh, yes, she's clever," he sighed; "she's bound to get to the top. They say she has more perseverance than any student at the Normal Art School, and she has contrived to take in a lot of society things, too. She's been working mother to get her invitations; mother has about as much knowledge of what she's up to as a six months old infant. She's awfully capable, though, and I don't know what mother would do without her to write her letters and reports. Oh, Margaret, you don't know what a rest it is to get back to you! Don't you see, dear child, how safe and comfortable it will be for us both when every one knows we are engaged? They will let us alone."

"Suppose you should find that to have peace would mean to be 'deadly dull'? Eloise is very interesting. One can't be bored with her. I

shall think it all right if you want to be engaged to Eloise."

"I don't want to be, you exasperating child! I have come all these miles because I want your sympathy; and because you worm every thought in my brain out of me, you think I want to marry Eloise. I, marry Mrs. Howland's daughter?"

"I don't see that it makes the least difference who her mother is," Margaret said sturdily.

"Don't you? Then you would n't mind marrying a man who belonged to an undesirable family?"

"Not if I cared a lot for him. Is n't it lucky, Philip," and she flashed a smile at him, "that my family is partly the same as yours? It must give you such an easy feeling about me."

"Oh, Peggy, you adorable child!" and he seized her hand. "Tell me you care for me a little. Do you seriously mean, Peggy darling, that you would n't mind at all if I were to marry Eloise?"

Peggy looked thoughtful for a moment. "I should hate it," she replied with candor.

That night for almost the first time in her life Margaret had little sleep. She saw that she was fast coming to the dividing of the ways. She did not wish to be engaged so soon, even to Philip, but she must give him a definite answer. As he had said, it was not fair to keep him in suspense. Margaret felt young and ignorant of life and of

her own heart. She had, with her cousin, that sense of intimate confidence which means complete understanding, but leaves no sense of mystery. If this were love, it would be the glad sharing of every-day life, and a peaceful contentment that would make the future full of pleasant things.

Was this a strong enough feeling? Her mother said it was a safer foundation for happiness than a more ardent love; but Margaret was not sure that this was true. She had imagined that to love deeply would mean the sharing of the things of the spirit, profound experiences, of which as yet she had had only a glimpse.

The days passed, and still Richard did not come. Margaret saw she had been mistaken in believing that she counted for anything in his life. She remembered with burning cheeks that all the advances had been on her side. She had made them with happy unconsciousness, thinking of him at first as a lonely, friendless lad, who needed kindness; and later, as a busy man, who was too absorbed in his profession to have time or thought to give to her, but who, nevertheless, valued her friendship. It was evident, however, that he really wished to avoid her, or he would have given some explanation of his failure to keep his appointment. She would never again make the mistake of urging him to come to see her.

CHAPTER XX

THE ELDER BROTHER

AFTER his interview with Margaret, Richard had gone home in a state of exhilaration, and his mother, who was in bed with bronchitis, wondered at the cheerfulness of his face.

"What has happened to you, Richard?" she asked. "You look as if some one had left you a fortune."

And the next evening all through supper Eloise joked him about his appearance. "Do you see, father, that Richard has on his good clothes and a new necktie?" she inquired. "I think he is going to call on his best girl," and she laughed, for best girls seemed so utterly out of Richard's line.

If his father remembered where he was going, he did not make any sign.

Richard joined in the laugh. He felt that he had never known before what it was to be young. He was so happy that his whole future seemed a succession of splendid work, for Margaret really wanted him to come to see her.

After supper he went upstairs to shut down his windows, for he knew it must be raining in at the

south. He took out his watch, and saw that it was too early to start. He must not get to the Wares' before eight o'clock, for they had a late supper; so he took up a book. He thought he heard the scraping of wheels along the road, and wondered vaguely who had come to their barn to take shelter from the storm. The low growling of thunder was changing to louder and louder peals, and the flashes of lightning were becoming more frequent. He looked again at his watch. It was still too early for his appointment, but his impatience was so great that he thought he had better be on the road before the storm was any worse.

As he was about to leave his room he heard a low knock.

"Come in," he said indifferently, thinking it was Eloise.

The door was pushed open in a cautious way, and his brother stood before him.

"Lawrence! Where on earth did you come from?"

"That's a cordial way of greeting your brother when he has been gone eight months!"

"Come in," Richard repeated, trying to be hospitable. "I've got an engagement in the village, so I'll have to leave you in ten minutes, but father and Eloise will be glad to see you. Mother is in bed with bronchitis."

"Yes, I know; that is why I stole into the

house. I was afraid the sight of me might kill her with joy. I will sit down, since you're so pressing. You do have the most uncomfortable chairs."

He tilted one back and took a survey of the room.

"You still have the same broken pitcher, and you have n't got around to getting a new piece of oil-cloth. Great Scott! If this is n't a dead-and-alive hole."

"If you have n't anything better to do than to criticise my belongings, I'll say good-by, for I'm in a hurry."

Lawrence rose and put a detaining hand on his brother's shoulder. "Richard, old fellow, there's something I've got to say to you."

"Say it quickly, then. I suppose you want some money, but I've given you more than I can spare."

"Oh, you are as hard as nails. I'd rather be a prodigal seven times over than to be in your shoes. What is it in your Bible about the man's forgiving his brother seventy times? And you can't forgive me even once. I'd rather starve than take your old money."

"Well, if you don't want money, what is it then?"

"I do want money, confound it! Not for myself, though. The fact is, Richard, I don't know how to break it to you, but that last job

did n't pan out well. I was fired, but on the strength of it— Well, I'm in a nasty hole; I thought the job was going to be permanent, and I — I — got married."

"Married!" Richard looked at him in sheer astonishment.

"She's the loveliest girl on God's earth, and that's the solemn fact."

Lawrence was hunting for something in one of his pockets, and presently flung his marriage certificate at his brother.

"You sound as if you did n't believe any one could be such a fool. Look at that, if you don't believe me," and Richard saw that on the fifteenth day of January his brother had been married to "Celestine Leggett, aged seventeen years."

"She's just crazy about me, and I'm wild about her. You can't imagine getting daft over a girl, old sobersides; you have n't it in you. She's a plucky little thing. She says it will come out all right."

So Lawrence had married Gus Leggett's daughter! Richard was almost stunned. How could his mother bear the news? And what would his fastidious sister say? But, worst of all, it came over him with a swift intuition that this step of Lawrence's would make the barrier well-nigh impassable between Margaret Ware and himself. Gus Leggett was now his brother

Lawrence's father-in-law, and Gus Leggett was the utility man at the Edgefield House.

"It's a bad business," Richard said.

"So that's the way you look at it? What's the saving of me is a bad business! And you call yourself a Christian! I expect that if the prodigal had come home with a wife, they would n't have killed the fatted calf."

"Where is she now? Did you leave her in New York?"

"Well, I guess not! We like each other well enough to stick to each other. We are not like the Wares. I hate your fine ladies! The lower classes know how to love."

"Where is she?" Richard asked again.

"I left her out in the barn in the buggy."

"In the barn! In this thunder shower!"

"It takes more than that to scare Tina Howland. I wanted to make sure she'd have a warm welcome before I brought her in, and I guess from present appearances we shall have to make up our minds to spend the night in the barn."

"Why did n't you take her to her father and mother?"

"Because Gus has believed the most outrageous stories against me, and I don't dare take her back until some one has paved the way. I thought you cared enough about me to do it, but I see I was wrong."

"She can stay here until the shower is over,

and then you can take her home to her father like a man. You can't expect your mother and your sister to welcome a girl like Tina Leggett."

"I'm glad I'm not religious," said Lawrence, hotly. "Tina is as good a girl as breathes. And you mean to tell me that I can't bring home my wife, just because she happens to be Gus Leggett's daughter? Who are you, anyway, with your stuck-up airs? You can't get away from the fact that you are my brother, and we are both of us the great-grandsons of Gideon Baker."

Lawrence's words were not without their effect. With a heavy heart Richard saw that there was no help for it, he must stay and meet his new sister; it would be impossible to go to see Margaret Ware to-night. As he saw the chance of this precious interview slipping away, he had a feeling of misery as acute as if he were resigning his interest in her for all time.

"I'll go out with you now and see your wife," he said.

"Stop, Richard; I have n't got through yet. I must have money; I'm owing for a lot of things. You see she had to have a trousseau, like all women except Eve. Good Lord! What an easy time Adam had! She did n't think we could afford the things, but I made her get them. I thought the job was going to hold out, so I got

her a blue velveteen suit that just chimes in with her eyes, and one of those fluffy white boas and a picture hat with a long blue feather, and if she is n't a peach! She beats Peggy Ware all hollow, and you 'll say so yourself. Then she had to have a few frills. They trusted us all right at first, but lately they 've made things mighty uncomfortable by dunning me for the money."

"So you expect me to pay for your wife's trousseau," Richard broke in.

"You do put things in such an unpleasant way. Of course I 'll pay you as soon as I can."

The brothers talked together for some time. It did not seem to Richard at first that he was in any way bound to lend his brother money. It was like the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Why should he be called upon to pay for Lawrence's extravagance? Yet if he did not do so, what would happen? He went over and over the matter from every point of view. He had his father's horror of debt, which seemed to him a disgrace, and he knew his mother had lent Lawrence more money than she could afford. Could it be possible that it was his duty to take his slender savings, earned by such hard work and economy, and give them to pay the price of Celestine Leggett's wedding clothes? As he had put the money away he had had half-defined dreams of its going to the furnishing of a house that perhaps was only a castle in Spain, where he might

some day bring Margaret in that wonderful country of the imagination. And now he saw his house crumble and his dreams fade; for he knew with the certainty of the man who sees clearly and acts swiftly that he must pay Lawrence's bills. More than that, he must hold out a friendly hand to this girl, for she was Lawrence's wife.

"Give me the bills," he cried. "I'll pay them. But remember, it's not to happen again. I give you fair warning that if you run up any more bills, I won't be responsible for them."

"You have a mighty graceful way of doing a favor. However, I thank you very much just the same. I suppose you can't help your manners."

"They're equal to yours, anyway," Richard retorted.

The brothers went out together into the storm, to the barn, and in one of the flashes of lightning Richard first saw Celestine's face. She looked hardly more than a child, and she had the musical voice that is the inheritance of so many of her mother's countrywomen.

"I expect you are not a bit glad to see me," she said plaintively, "but I just could n't help it. I care for Lawrence so; and I'll do anything I can for your mother, if she'll let us stay."

She looked so gentle and her blue eyes were so appealing, that Richard gave her hand a friendly grip.

“Mother is too sick to hear the news yet; it will be pretty hard on her and Eloise, because it is so unexpected; but it is harder still for you to come among strangers. I’ll go in and tell my sister that you are here.”

When Eloise heard the news, coupled with Richard’s request that she should get the spare-room ready, she said: “I am not going to see her. Why should I have to meet a girl like Tina Leggett? Those girls are the talk of the town.”

“Tina seems different from the others. She has n’t their bold ways. She is a gentle little thing.”

“Of course *you* would think so. I never saw a man yet who did n’t believe in a pretty face. But if she’s an angel herself, the family connection is degrading. It is outrageously selfish of Lawrence to marry so as to disgrace us. How can I expect any one worth looking at will want to marry me when he’ll have to be connected with a girl whose mother is cook at the Edgefield House, and whose father is a lazy, drinking stable-man? Do you suppose I will wait on Gus Leggett’s daughter? Why should she force herself on us? Let her go home.”

“To-morrow they can go to her father and mother, but we can’t refuse to take them in to-night in this storm. Bring me the sheets.”

When Richard spoke in that tone, his sister always flew to do his bidding, and as he was pil-

ing up the logs in the fireplace in the spare-room that had been closed long enough to have the accumulated chill and dampness of months, Eloise sulkily spread up the bed. Richard came over to her and put his hand on her arm with awkward and unaccustomed tenderness.

"It is awfully hard for you," he said, "and it is n't a cinch for me, but we've all got to stick together. She is Lawrence's wife, and I am sure by her face that she is an honest girl. Perhaps it will be the making of him. Anyway, we can't go back on Lawrence."

The next morning Richard and Eloise forced their unwilling brother to play the part of a man and take his wife home to her own people. The young couple were given a warm welcome, for Gus felt such pride in being connected with a family so respectable as the Howlands that he could forgive Lawrence as a son-in-law his many defects as a man.

Richard asked that the marriage might be kept secret until his mother was strong enough to bear the shock of the news.

Lawrence went at once to Boston, where he heard of a clerkship, leaving Celestine with her parents until he could send for her. He wrote at first with his usual buoyant hopefulness, but he was in Edgefield again at the end of a fortnight, for his talents were once more unappreciated, and although he was staying at the farm, he spent so

much of his time hanging around Celestine at the Edgefield House, that Gus finally said he should take matters into his own hands and announce the marriage, for he could not have his girl talked about.

Richard had intended to go to see Margaret the night after his brother's home-coming, to explain his failure to keep his appointment and to confide to her the news of his brother's marriage before the world knew of it. He was on his way when he saw Philip in the distance, and he followed him and watched him turn in at the Wares' gate, and go up the steps. The door opened and a radiant figure in white stood there, and rapturously led Philip into the house.

With a sense of overwhelming bitterness Richard knew that he was too late. Common courtesy, however, required that he should make an apology, but the longer he put it off the more difficult it became. When he finally did call, Margaret's father and mother were present during a great part of the interview, and when he was at last alone with her, something in her manner froze his impulse towards confidence.

"I was very sorry I could n't come to see you the other evening," he began, "but Lawrence came home unexpectedly, and I could n't get off."

He felt the excuse was a lame one, and tried to frame a sentence telling her of his brother's marriage.

“You must be very glad to have Lawrence back,” Margaret said politely.

“I have been busy all the week until to-night, because Uncle Gideon has been away. I meant to come around the next evening to explain, but —”

“The next evening Philip was here; it is always such a joy to see Philip.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE ORATION

THERE was to be an oration in Edgefield on the afternoon of the Fourth of July, as was the yearly custom, and Dr. Baker was to be the orator. When he was a boy, Gideon had felt that to deliver the Fourth of July oration on Edgefield Common would be to reach the acme of fame. Now, at past fifty, his standards had changed, but he knew that the honor would please his womenkind.

Gus Leggett planned to go with his daughters, and he hoped that Lawrence Howland would join them, for all Edgefield knew now of the marriage, as Gus had spread the news of it far and wide.

Gus and his three girls reached the Common long before the speaking was to begin. Madge, the dark-haired one, wore a dress of bright red, while Celestine wore blue, and had forget-me-nots on her hat; and Viola Mary completed the patriotic effect of the family by wearing white. Gus, in his best suit, was indeed a proud father,

and he treated his daughters to lemonade and peanuts with the lordly manner of a multi-millionaire. The girls soon gathered a crowd of young men about them, and a lively firing of peanuts began on both sides.

Philip was staying at his cousin Sophia's, so loyalty to the family obliged him to be present. He was strolling about with a very bored air, when he received Viola Mary's ammunition in the back of his neck; therefore, to while away the time until Margaret and her father and mother should come, he bought some peanuts so that he could pay her back in her own coin.

When the Wares came a little later, Margaret did not seem at all pleased when she saw him thus occupied.

"Peggy, you need n't look so disapproving," he said. "When you are with the Leggett girls, you've got to play up to them, and on the Fourth of July you can't be too stiff, especially now that Lawrence Howland has married Tina."

"What!" gasped Margaret.

"Yes. Have n't you heard? Gus has been telling every one. Lawrence has done for himself socially, poor boy."

Richard had given up his seat, so Lawrence was able to reserve a place for Celestine on the stand, and she went away in a blaze of glory, leaving the other emblems of patriotism in her family to look after her with a sigh of envy. Viola

Mary, indeed, was to have a place on the coveted stand, but she would be lost in a group of high school girls, while Tina would have the proud satisfaction of sitting with the relations of the orator of the day. Lawrence and Celestine were in a seat just below the Wares, and beyond Celestine were Fanny and Doris Ingram. And then something happened which brought the tears into Celestine's blue eyes, and made her long to be in the joyous outskirts of the crowd with her father and sister; for when Lawrence introduced her to the Ingrams, they gave merely the stiffest inclination of their heads, and proceeded to talk across her to Lawrence, in front of her to Delia, and behind her to Margaret and Philip, but never to her. Finally, Margaret saw what was happening, and she leaned over and said: "I am going to speak to you, Mrs. Howland, though I don't know as you remember me. I used to see you when we were both little girls. I am Margaret Ware."

Afterwards Philip admonished her for speaking to Tina Howland when it was so wholly unnecessary.

"Doris and Fanny were perfectly cruel to her," she said; "I could n't sit by and not do something."

"The Ingrams were all right; the Leggetts are n't at all the sort of girls for you to know."

"If you know them well enough to throw

peanuts at them, I don't think it will hurt me to say a few words to Celestine Howland."

"That 's very different. There is n't any harm in them that I know of, but they are awfully common, the kind you can chuck under the chin."

Meanwhile the crowd was growing rapidly, and Gideon was surprised to find that the Common was full to overflowing. He had a feeling of supreme satisfaction. It was most gratifying to have the goodwill of so many of his townsmen. There were a few rowdy-looking mill-hands on the edge of the crowd, but for the most part it was composed of staid and orderly citizens.

He looked down from his speaker's stand with pride at dear Sophia and Delia sitting on the front bench, and he was glad to see that Edmund was there with his wife and daughter. Edmund Ware had never had the honor of being the Fourth of July orator. In the background he caught a glimpse of the surly face of Jerry McKnight. He could not be there for any good purpose. Jerry had been his enemy ever since he had turned him out of the Edgefield House, and Gideon felt sure that it was largely his influence that had kept the hotel from living up to its new name.

The process by which it had gradually deteriorated was not one that the doctor liked to dwell on. It was easy to explain it to himself, but he did not know just how he could put it to Sophia, if she ever learned the truth. Sophia was a

fanatic in regard to temperance. The world could not be run on such principles. It was the rich people, the automobilists, who had first demanded something stronger than ginger ale and lemonade, and then, — but why recount the almost imperceptible stages through which he had been led by Kate, to think that so long as they made money, it did not greatly matter how they made it? Poor Kate! That scamp of a Lawrence had cost her dear.

It was truly inspiring to hear "America" sung by the clear, young voices of the school-children. Dr. Baker included them all in a genial sweep of his benevolent glance.

The great moment came at last; Mr. Ingram made a gratifying introduction, and Gideon began to speak. He had committed his paper to memory, so that his words might have a graceful, impromptu air.

He gave a graphic picture of the framers of the Declaration of Independence. He said it was well to see them as they really were, men of flesh and blood with the sturdy virtues and the faults that are common to our own time. He described them graphically, one by one.

"We are seeing these forefathers of ours in their true colors," he said at last; "we should take the masks from off the lay figures of history." Gideon congratulated himself on this neat metaphor; he paused, waiting for the

applause that had followed more than one of his well-turned sentences. To his intense annoyance the interval was filled in by a question coming from some one on the edge of the crowd.

“How about your own mask, Gideon Patrick?”

He recognized the voice of Jerry McKnight. He went on as if he had not heard the question, but he realized that something like an incoming wave had swept over the audience; it was a laugh repressed on the front seats into a mere titter, but growing in strength until, on the edge of the crowd, it reached a guffaw.

The interruption made him nervous. He lost his place, and not having any notes, he found himself repeating one of his earlier jokes by which he had scored a point. Then he plunged into his subject and improvised.

He was getting on very well when in an unlucky moment it occurred to him to quote the Latin motto that was on the coat of arms of his wife's ancestors on the maternal side. He translated it for the benefit of the crowd; and once again came that insulting voice, asking:—

“How about the motto on the coat of arms of your own ancestor on the maternal side? Give us the O'Connor motto!”

“The O'Connor motto, the O'Connor motto, Patrick, my boy!” called out a score of lusty voices.

Gideon turned white, and the expression came into his face that Kate had once seen. It was indeed as if his mask had been taken off, and the real man was looking out with scorn and rage at the crowd. His blandness and softness of manner were gone.

“If you think the Declaration of Independence meant that all men are free to indulge in license and to make jests of this kind, you have a poor opinion of the framers of the Constitution. We must have fair play; if, when I have finished my oration, any *gentleman*” (with a derisive emphasis on the word) “wishes to come up on this platform and make a speech, I am sure we shall all be glad to listen to him. I only ask that I may be given a fair hearing first.”

In reply there was the sound of many voices on the edge of the crowd. Mr. Ingram seemed powerless to interfere, but presently there came, in Dr. Ware's clear voice, these words: “Where are the policemen? Can't they see that one of our prominent citizens has the right to finish his oration in peace? You all ought to be proud of a man who has risen from the ranks and made a name for himself.”

“Give us the Baker motto,” some one said; and another insulting voice cried, “The Baker motto is, ‘Drink, pretty creature, drink.’ Let's give three cheers for the Temperance Hotel.”

A cracked voice presently sang out a couplet

from the doggerel lines that Edmund had composed and forgotten long before:—

“Run, fellows, run. Hide the whiskey.
Giddy Baker’s getting frisky.”

The rough men were fast becoming a mob, and Edmund Ware, with anger in his heart, left his seat in spite of his wife’s entreaties, and went rapidly through the crowd.

He found a policeman who was standing by irresolutely, and pointing to Gus Leggett, he said, “If you can arrest the ringleaders, we can have some peace. This man, I am sure, is at the bottom of the disturbance.”

Now, for almost the only time in his life, Gus had felt himself committed to the side of law and order. It was hard to have to restrain his tongue; he had thought of several witty remarks he might have made, but his connection with the Howland family demanded loyalty to the orator of the day.

“I have done nothing,” Gus declared. “Fair play! Gosh! I like to hear you talk!” and he turned to Dr. Ware. “Let any one who’s be’n standing near me say if I’ve disturbed the peace!” He looked hard at Richard Howland, who came to his rescue.

“You’ve mistaken your man, this time, Dr. Ware,” he stated. “Mr. Leggett has been as quiet as you were yourself.”

"You can beg my pardon, doc," Gus remarked with a grin.

"I, beg your pardon, you lazy, good-for-nothing fraud? If you have not taken any part in the disturbance, it is the first time."

"Do you know who you are talking to?" Gus demanded. "You 're talking to Lawrence Howland's father-in-law. Yes, sir, you be! I guess I hev jest as good a right to be proud of the orator of the day as you hev! He's your sister's husband, and he's my daughter's uncle. That makes us kinder connected, don't it, doc?" he added with a twinkle in his eye.

Gus had once confessed to his wife that he should have killed Dr. Ware long ago, if he, Gus, had not had a sense of humor.

"It is much more excitin' to try to git even with him. What would be the fun in life with him dead?"

There was a buzz of many voices, and then some one shouted:—

"To the Edgefield House, boys, to the Edgefield House! We'll unmask our prominent fellow townsman. He would n't let Jerry stay because Jerry sold liquor. We'll show the foremost citizens a Temperance Hotel!"

The rougher part of the crowd dispersed, and, like a whirlwind, swept along Main Street up past Dr. Baker's house and the mills to the Edgefield House.

The policemen were powerless, and Mr. Ingram, retaining the semblance of dignity, rose and said, "I move that this meeting be adjourned."

"We'll all go to the Edgefield House to see that there is no destruction of property," said Dr. Ware.

And Gideon, pale, but outwardly calm, knew that the day of judgment had come.

CHAPTER XXII

THE JUDGMENTS OF MEN

KATE was at the farm, straining her eyes to catch the first glimpse of Andrew and Richard, for she was eager to hear all about the oration. It was a bitter disappointment not to be well enough to share in the glory of the occasion. Mrs. Hart had come to help for a few days while Eloise went away for needed rest and change. She was glad to escape the sensation that she knew the announcement of her brother's marriage would cause. Their mother had borne the shock better than they had feared she would. Kate was a proud woman, and no one but herself knew the extent of the misery and anxiety that her handsome, wayward boy had caused her. She could never forget her brilliant young brother's tragic end, and had often feared that Lawrence might follow in his footsteps. If she had known that the marriage was contemplated, she would have fought it with all her power, but now that it was an accomplished fact, she could not but be grateful that Lawrence, in his despair when Margaret refused him, had decided to wreck his life by an unfortunate marriage rather than to end it.

Lawrence had flung himself down at his mother's feet and buried his face in her lap, and with tears raining down his cheeks, had begged her to be kind to Tina, who was a good girl, and who was going to be his salvation; and her mother love was strong enough to make her hope that this might be true. Kate had grown much gentler since her illness; two years ago she could not have forgiven Lawrence.

It was almost supper time. Where could Andrew be? Richard might have been tempted to stay with Lawrence to see the fireworks in the evening, but it was unlike Andrew to stay away from her so long, and Kate felt aggrieved. She heard the sound of wheels at last, but it was only her neighbors who lived beyond them on the hill. Kate went to the head of the stairs and listened. Mrs. Hart had gone out to ask about the oration. Kate heard Mrs. Upham say in her shrill voice, "They insulted him right before his face; they as good as told him he sold liquor."

Mrs. Hart evidently cautioned her, for she lowered her voice.

Kate, ignoring the fact that she had not been over the stairs since her illness, crept down to the lower landing.

"There was a regular fight at the Edgefield House," she heard Mrs. Upham say. "My husband told me they found a lot of brandy and whiskey and beer and things, and the temperance

fellers smashed some of the bottles and the mill-hands got a hold of some and got drunk. And they all were a-hollering, 'Three cheers for Giddy Baker and his Temperance Hotel!'"

She lost the question Mrs. Hart asked.

"Yes 'm, there were," Mrs. Upham replied; "Gus Leggett was there, very busy, trying to protect the property. They had a hard time trying to find the stuff, it was so well hidden. They said no one but a woman, and a clever woman at that, could hide it so well. And then one of the mill-hands sung out Mrs. Howland's name.

"'Three cheers for Kate Howland, the smartest woman in town,' said he. And then Richard up and hit out, so as to knock him down, but Gus Leggett grabbed him and said we could n't have no blood shed. Lawrence pitched right in too, and got a cut on his hand. No, ma'm, Lawrence wa'n't hurt so as to amount to anything. Yes, ma'm, it is all over, or we should n't be coming back. We waited to hear the end from the men-folks, and I wanted to stay longer, but I knew grandma would be anxious; she's alone in the house. I expect your men-folks will be coming back soon."

Kate had sunk down on one of the lower steps. She wondered dully what Andrew and Richard would say when they learned the truth. Andrew was so loving that she felt she could make him

understand how it was her desire to give her children the good things of life that had led her into this underhanded course. But Richard, with his stern judgment and his unswerving sense of honor, what would Richard say?

She crept back one stair at a time, ignoring the pounding of her heart. She would be lying down when they came and would pretend to have heard nothing. This would delay the evil hour that she knew must come, the hour when exposure could no longer be delayed. What was her uncle doing now — whose pride in his fair reputation was so great?

She was lying on the sofa in her bedroom with closed eyes when Richard opened the door softly.

“Hush, she is sleeping,” he said to his father. They closed the door again and went away.

“Thank heaven for this reprieve.”

When Richard was bidding her good-night, she looked so ill that he felt her pulse. It was so rapid it seemed as if she must have taken some unusual exercise. “You have n’t been out of your room, mother, have you?” he asked.

“No,” said Kate. Whenever she lied, it was boldly and unflinchingly. “Good-night, Richard; you have n’t told me much about the oration.”

“I ’ll tell you to-morrow.”

Kate was most anxious to see Gideon and learn what his course of action was to be, so the next morning, as soon as her husband and Richard

were out of the house, and when Mrs. Hart was busy washing, she crept downstairs and telephoned to her uncle, asking him to come to see her at once. After she had done this she went over to the open door and looked across the field to her sweet-peas. They needed cutting, and the entry table was dusty, and Andrew and Richard had flung their best hats down on it. She felt that she was needed at every turn, for Mrs. Hart was too old to do anything but the most pressing work. She missed Eloise, who was very handy about the house, but she would far rather have her away and happy than at home complaining. As Kate stood in the doorway shading her eyes with her hand, Dr. Ware and Margaret drove by. He was on his way to the Uphams' to see his patient, their grandmother.

"Good-morning, Kate; I am glad you are well enough to be downstairs," he called out cheerily.

"I am not downstairs, I am tucked up on the lounge upstairs, where Richard left me, and don't you dare go back on me and tell tales, Ed Ware. You always stood by me in the primary school, and I guess you can now."

She looked with mingled admiration and resentment at Edmund's fair-haired daughter in her spotless white frock. She was certainly attractive enough to turn any man's head, but as useless as the lilies of the field. And this girl with her happy air of youth had broken Lawrence's

heart without one regret, and was the cause of his unfortunate marriage. A little later she would marry Philip Bates, who might have cared for Eloise, except for her. She must admit that there was something winning about her; the laughter in her eyes and at the corners of her mouth showed that she was her father's daughter, but Kate could not forget that she was her mother's daughter, too.

"You can trust us," Dr. Ware said, as they drove on; "Peggy and I won't go back on you."

Kate was lying on the lounge in her room when Gideon arrived. He came in with a weary, dejected air, very different from his usual springy step.

"Well, old girl," he said as he sat down by her, "I expect the game is all over for us. The only thing left to do is to turn the property over for the Gideon Baker Hospital. That's what we ought to have done in the first place."

"You can speak for yourself, Gideon, but as long as I have the breath of life in me, I'm going to hang on to the property; and when I die, I shall leave it to my children."

"But you don't understand; our reputation is at stake."

"I know we've been caught red-handed."

Kate always had such a crude way of putting things. To speak of being caught red-handed

was to suggest that they had done an unpardonable thing. It would have seemed right enough to the community, he argued, if they had not lived in a prohibition state. Who but temperance fanatics would blame them for selling liquor in moderation? Besides, it was not his fault; it was Kate's. If it had not been for her accursed ambition, the Edgefield House would now be a hospital. He remembered, too, how he had been meaning for some time to hand over his share of the property to Kate; he had only been waiting to make a little more money first.

"Nothing but giving up the property can ever clear us in the eyes of the community," he said.

"Your conscience was n't so tender before we were found out," she reminded him. "If I've done wrong, I'll take the penalty. What I have done I did for my children's sake. I'm not going to give up the property, even if I do have to stop selling liquor."

"If it's possible to keep on and make anything without selling liquor, I don't want to let go my share."

As yet he had made only a partial explanation to Sophia and Delia, and he was wondering what he could say to his daughter if she looked at him with her penetrating young eyes and demanded the very truth. Just then his quick ears caught the sound of Sophia's voice at the front

door, and he realized she had come to make Kate a morning call.

Mrs. Hart hesitated. "The doctor is with her now, ma'am," she said.

"Is he? Tell her that Delia and I are here, please; we can wait."

Ten minutes later, when Kate sent for them, Delia was struck by her quick breathing and her flushed face. What could her father have been saying to excite her so? And he, too, looked unlike himself. He must have been giving her the history of yesterday afternoon.

Sophia was full of the important subject; she could think of little else. "I suppose Gideon has been telling you all about the raid yesterday," she said; "you 'd have been proud of Richard. It was splendid the way he stood up for you and Gideon; it did my heart good to hear of it."

Gideon moved nervously in his chair. He and Kate had agreed that there would be a certain desperate comfort in owning everything, but now that the moment had come for confession, he shrank from it.

"Sophia," Kate burst out, "it was all true what the people said about me, every blessed word of it. Are n't you proud to be connected with the smartest woman in town?"

"Kate, it is n't true; you are joking."

"Ask Gideon whether it is true."

She gave him his opportunity. If he chose, he

could screen himself behind her, and he knew that Sophia at least would never question his silence. But when he did not reply, he felt himself encircled with the scorn of Kate's glance, and he realized that he should carry about with him until the day of his death the knowledge that she thought him a coward; and besides, Delia could not be long deceived; she would learn the truth some time.

"It was all a very unfortunate business, Sophia," he said. "Our best class of guests demanded wine."

"Did they? But of course you did not give it to them. I was sure all along that Gus Leggett was at the bottom of the whole trouble."

"It has always been a woman who is at the bottom of everything, from Eve down," said Kate. "Gideon will tell you so."

"I have been to blame, too," he acknowledged. "We needed the money, Kate and I."

It took a long explanation to make Sophia understand; Delia had grasped the situation at once. Sophia was so in the habit of thinking her husband's judgment infallible that even now she found it hard to admit that the fault had been in part his. It was the trend of the times, Kate's ambition, and Gus's love of strong drink that were to blame. One thing was clear to her, however: that Gideon must give up at once all claim to the property. In vain he argued that it

might be possible to run the hotel without the sale of liquor, but Sophia was firm.

"The same thing would happen again," she said. "As long as Gus Leggett is there, there can't help but be more or less drinking on the sly."

"Kate needs the income, and it would be hard for her to manage without any assistance from me."

"Kate must do whatever she thinks is right, we can't judge for her. But this thing I know: you are the most prominent doctor in town, and you have always stood for everything that is best. People are very uncharitable; they put the worst construction on things. They would be sure to feel that you were still conniving at the sale of liquor. You cannot have any suspicion attaching to your good name. Delia and I won't mind if we have to economize in every possible way. I am sure that what you did was done for us, but now you find that all we want is your best good, you 'll be glad to give up all part in the Edgefield House."

He looked into his wife's gentle face and he saw there her belief in his fundamental goodness. To be what she thought him seemed something worth striving for. Then he glanced at his daughter and in her eyes he read the sad knowledge of the frailty of human nature; but he also saw there infinite forbearance. If her father

had failed to live up to his standards, he was not the only one who had yielded to his own particular temptation.

Gideon had not felt such peace of mind for many years as on that afternoon when he was sitting quietly at home with his wife and daughter, knowing that his decision to give up all claim to the Edgefield House had made them both so happy. But Kate, tossing feverishly on her couch, knew that she had her interview with Richard still before her. She had told her husband and he had been very silent for a long time; then he had come up to her and kissed her and said, "Poor Kitty, this has all been very hard on you," and Kate felt that his pity and forgiveness were the measure of his great love.

After supper when Richard was sitting with his mother, he noticed her eyes fixed on him with an expression of unusual tenderness. "Richard, my dear, dear boy," she said, "you will never know how much I have loved you."

He drew his chair up close to her sofa, and stooping down, he kissed her with a kind of shy awkwardness.

She seized his hand. "Richard, you do love me, don't you?" she asked.

"Mother, you know how much I love you. I love you, and I am proud of you."

"Proud of me?" Her voice trailed away into a bitter little laugh. "Proud of a woman who is only

a farmer's wife and who's had just a country high school education? You, who have been through college and the Medical School, and know people who live in grand houses on Beacon Hill?"

"There is n't one of them," he maintained stoutly, "who would do so much for her children as you've done for us, or who'd live more up to her idea of what is right. You have the man's standard of honor, mother; you've always played fair."

Kate could not tell him now. "Richard," she said, "I sometimes think I'm not going to live very long. You know with my trouble of the heart I am likely to go at any time, like that." She put one hand across the other with a suggestive motion.

"What makes you think so? You may live for years."

"Yes, I know; that would be worse still. I don't want to live, if I've got to be a useless invalid. I mean to get well, but if I should go, I am wondering how you and your father will get on without me. Eloise can always take care of herself, and Lawrence is fixed, for better, for worse. Much as I disapprove of that marriage, it's a kind of a comfort to know that there's some one besides me whose business it is to love him. And she does love him, that girl. She's got the infinite pity, and charity, and tenderness that I thought only a mother could have.

"I wish you had some one to care for you, if I go. I'm glad you have n't any one now. There never has been any one, for you, has there, Richard, except me? I like to think I've always been first."

His silence roused her jealousy. "You don't mean that you do care for any one, do you, Richard?"

He hesitated for a second, then he said, "I have never spoken a word of love to any woman, mother."

"I knew it," she cried exultantly. "I have been the only woman in the world for two men, your father and you. It is worth while to have lived for that. But, Richard, when I do go, you'll need some one to comfort you, and to-day I was thinking, when Delia and her mother were here, how I wished that you knew Delia better. She is such a fine girl."

"Delia!" he exclaimed. His judgment had always approved of his cousin Delia, but he had never been in the least drawn to her. "I should as soon think of going to Delia for sympathy as to the hydrant. They'd both spray me all over with cold water."

Kate laughed, but she did not relinquish the subject.

"If you stupid men were n't so wrapped up in self-love, you'd see that a girl like that would be a great deal better wife for a man than one

of your fine ladies in white, who 'd sympathize with you down to the ground and never turn a hand to help you. If I could once see you engaged to a girl like Delia, —”

“Mother, I 'd do a good deal for you,” he broke in, “but a man must choose his own wife.”

“Must he? If some one were to choose for him, there would n't be such a lot of fool marriages. Look at Ed Ware and his wife. She 's not done one blessed thing for him, and yet he adored her when they were engaged.”

“He adores her now. That sort of feeling, when a woman can inspire it in a man, is worth any amount of things she can do for him with her hands.”

“Is it? Perhaps it may be, if you have plenty of money and can hire everything done. All I can say is, that for my part, I 'd rather be a polar bear chained to an iceberg than a man married to Alice Ware. If marriages are made in heaven, heaven is a different sort of place from what it 's cracked up to be.”

“You and father seem to have hit it off pretty well.”

“That is because I happened to have a little common sense. Do you suppose your father was the first man who wanted to marry me, or the first one I was in love with? I 'd had considerable experience of the sex before I settled down on him, and I had found out that a few of the

sterling qualities count for more than mere charm. Delia has all the old-fashioned virtues. Won't you promise me, Richard, — it will commit you to nothing, — that you will try to be friends with her?"

"No, mother." He spoke gently, but firmly.

"You won't? You have the face to sit there and tell your mother up and down, when she 's a sick woman, that you won't try to be friends with a fine girl like your cousin Delia?"

"I don't like to disappoint you, mother, but it would be worse still to lie to you, and that's what it would amount to if I said 'Yes.' Delia and I could n't get on any better than fire and water. She 'd try to put me out, and if she did n't succeed, I 'd just go raging on, twice as fierce as if she had n't tried to stop me. We never did get on from the time we were children, so there is no use in trying to work that combination."

"Oh, you are just like all the rest of them," she said; "you are all caught by a pretty face. But I can't have you flinging yourself away as Lawrence has done. However, perhaps it 's better than if he had married a lazy girl like Peggy Ware, who 's never done a useful thing since she was born."

The sudden change which came over Richard's face was not unobserved by his mother. It betrayed him more surely than his words.

"Mother, I can't sit quietly by and hear you

say these things, first about Mrs. Ware and then about her daughter. If truth and high ideals, loyalty and constancy, count for anything with you, and I know they do, you would be as quick to praise those ladies as you are to blame them, if you knew them as well as I do."

"You know them well?" she cried jealously. "You 've never told me that you knew them well."

"I know them, and I admire them."

Kate sprang from her couch.

"I know them, and I despise them. I despise them because they are cold-hearted, proud, and insolent. They look on us as a lower class in the same grade with Gus Leggett. You need n't try to stop me; you know yourself they do. I expect you 'll tell me next that you 're in love with that yellow-haired chit, who wears three duck skirts a week and a clean shirt-waist every day. Have n't I seen them hanging out on Mrs. Upham's line, when she has been doing their extra washing? I don't suppose that girl could wash and iron a shirt-waist if her everlasting salvation depended on it. 'Truth and high ideals' won't help you out on the laundry question. If you were to marry a girl like Peggy Ware, I don't know what I'd do. But I need n't concern myself, she would n't look at you. No girl with a Boston grandmother would demean herself by marrying Tina Leggett's brother-in-law. Do you

suppose she 'd value the things that I 'm proud of you for? You have your father's standards of right and you 've got some of my push, but a girl like that, for all her own high ideals, would rather marry a man who has money and is in her own set, even if he is a little shaky as to ideals. And then there was the scandal yesterday. You see if any of them will want to have anything to do with us after that."

"They couldn't be so unfair; they will know as well as I did that the crowd pitched into an innocent woman to hide its own guilt."

Kate's eyes had grown very large, and a strained expression came into her face. She could lie with a grand air about small things, but she, too, had a sense of honor, and it seemed contemptible to her to save her reputation at the expense of others. She had one horrible moment of mental and physical agony, and then she said, "Richard, it was true. It was I who hid the liquor. I got drawn into having it sold there because I needed the money."

The worst of the mental suffering was over, but the physical anguish still kept on.

Richard turned very pale. "Mother," he gasped, "I can't believe it!"

He sank down and buried his face in his hands. He sat there while the little day clock on the mantelpiece ticked away for the longest minute that Mrs. Howland had ever known. When he

raised his head at last, he looked like a broken man. Nothing had ever touched him to this extent. His brother's habits, which had long been known to him, had seemed but the evolution of his character, and, unfortunate as Lawrence's marriage had been, there was no dishonor in it; but his mother, in spite of all her glaring surface faults, had stood to him for unswerving honor.

"Don't look at me like that, Richard," she entreated; "God alone can judge, for He alone knows the motives that were in my heart. If I have done wrong, it was for my children's sake."

"For your children's sake? Oh, mother, mother! How could you think that money coming in such a way would be anything but a curse? How could you, when you remembered your brother's death, put temptation in the way of other men? You knew Lawrence's inheritance. How could you countenance a plague spot in the midst of the community? No wonder that Lawrence could not pull himself together when you made it easy for him to yield to temptation. What good has the money done Eloise? It has given her desires beyond her income and made her discontented with her old life. And as for me, I'd rather have worked my way through the Medical School on bread and water than have taken any of the money, if I had known how it was made."

The physical pain at Kate's heart seemed to clutch her, and she burst into a storm of tears.

"Oh, you are hard, hard and unforgiving," she sobbed. "Some time you'll be sorry. Oh, the pain, Richard; I can't bear it. You must give me some of that medicine."

Richard went across the room for it in an agony of remorse. In his sorrow and humiliation he had forgotten his profession, and as he looked at his mother's face, he saw that a great change had come. It could not be that this was more serious than many attacks she had had before, but in the slow hours of the night, while he and his father were watching by Kate's bedside, there came another change which obliterated all the signs of suffering from her face, and with a sense of overwhelming despair, they realized that this was the change of death.

CHAPTER XXIII

RICHARD'S COMFORTERS

AFTER Kate's funeral, her husband and children went sorrowfully back to the lonely house. Eloise and Lawrence were very gentle with their father. The tears had been raining down poor Lawrence's cheeks all through the service, while Eloise, in her deep mourning, had a softened look on her face that touched the hearts of all her friends. Richard sat there apparently unmoved, with a strained, set look, and after they reached the farm, he gave his family short answers, and presently went off to his own room.

Eloise brought out a sheaf of letters to show Lawrence. "I never realized how many friends I had before," she said. "I have a beautiful letter from Madam Lancaster; she speaks of the way in which our parents still live on in our hearts. Would you like to read it?"

"No," said Lawrence, brusquely. "I'll bet you my bottom dollar that she'd never have had mother inside her house, and she treated you like a servant when you were there."

"You ought to forgive her if I can," said Eloise. "Would you like to see this letter from Mrs. Bates?"

The young fellow took it eagerly. He read it

through with emotion, and put it back in the envelope reverently.

"She 's all right," he remarked. "Have you heard from any of the Wares?"

"No, but Mrs. Edmund Ware sent some beautiful Jacqueminot roses. Richard has had a letter from old Mrs. Ware, but he 's so secretive, he has n't shown it to me. I can't think why he is so offish. I don't see any good in trouble if it does n't make one thoughtful for other people."

"We 've just got to leave him alone," said Lawrence; "he 'll be all right presently."

This did not prove to be the case, however, for as the days passed, Richard continued to eat his meals in moody silence, and to go off to his work, or up to his own room, directly afterwards. His self-reproach enveloped him like a black pall through dreary days and wakeful nights, "Oh, you are hard and unforgiving; you will be sorry some day." He could remember the very intonations of his mother's voice as she spoke these words. He longed inexpressibly for human sympathy, but he could tell his trouble to no one, and he brooded on it until it seemed to him that Lawrence was more worthy of forgiveness for all his sins of the flesh, than he, for that sin of pride of the spirit, that, feeling its own righteousness, failed to see the extenuating causes for another's fault.

He was walking along the street one day with

his thoughts still revolving in the same gloomy circle, when he saw Philip Bates coming towards him, his face fairly ablaze with happiness.

"Oh, Richard, old boy, I'm so glad to see you," he cried; "there's something I've been wanting to tell you. I'm engaged to Margaret Ware! I'm just about crazy with joy. I feel like shouting it out from the housetops. She's adorable! I imagine we shan't surprise anybody, for it is n't any new affair. We have been in love with each other ever since she was eight years old; she promised to marry me then, the darling!"

As he waited for some words of sympathy, he noticed how thin and worn Richard looked, and he suddenly remembered his mother's death. It certainly spoke well for Richard's heart that he could be so broken up over the loss of a parent who was anything but a credit to him. Philip was genuinely fond of his friend, and he cast about for some form of consolation to administer. They were approaching the Wares' gate, and he could think of no one who would be less of a Job's comforter in time of trouble than his own beloved little girl.

"Won't you come in and give us your blessing?" he asked. "Margaret is always so glad to see you." He felt that he was superhumanly generous in proposing to share her society with Richard, even for half an hour.

"I can't stop to-day; I'm very busy," said Richard, with more energy than he meant to put into the refusal. "You can take her my congratulations," he added stiffly.

The acute misery that Philip's announcement caused Richard made him feel as if his former sorrow and remorse were peace. He had often told himself that he could not hope to win Margaret's love, but he knew, now that she was lost to him, how strong had been his underlying and unacknowledged feeling that there was a subtle bond between them. His whole heart and soul cried out for Margaret. What a cheat life was, with its hints of supreme, imperishable happiness, and its grim truths!

After this there came days when Richard felt as if he were wrestling with the powers of darkness. It seemed to him that every one shunned him, and that every man's hand was against him. He felt as much alone as if he were the only inhabitant in a dead world.

Some days after the announcement of Margaret's engagement, as Richard was leaving his uncle's office, when he had received his orders for the afternoon, his cousin Delia stopped him in the passageway.

"Can't you wait a minute, Richard?" she asked.

"Not to-day; I am in a great hurry."

"Then I'll walk along with you," she said,

taking the privilege of a cousin. "I have been hanging around the house hoping to get a few words with you. I've just got to talk over Margaret's engagement with somebody that has sense enough to feel about it the way I do."

Richard made no comment. He began to stride along faster still.

"I can run if it is necessary," said Delia.

He slackened his pace at this, but his grave face did not relax into a smile.

"I ought to have known that it was coming," she continued, "but I had somehow taken it for granted she would feel that Philip would n't be old enough to settle down for the next ten years. Of course, I adore them both; Philip is a dear, lovable fellow, but he seems about as stable to tie to as a sky-rocket."

"What do you want?" Richard asked. "You women all demand the impossible for each other. Is n't it enough for her to marry a 'dear, lovable fellow'? If she is satisfied, I don't know why any one else should complain."

"You need n't be so rude," returned Delia, with her chin in the air. "I've got as good a right to my opinion as you have to yours."

"I did n't mean to be rude."

"I suppose you thought you were especially polite. Why, Richard, how badly you are looking! You look as if you had n't slept for a week."

"I'm all right," he said roughly.

"Well, you seem so overjoyed to see me, I am sorry to tell you I have got to go home."

As Richard strode on after Delia left him, he was vexed with her and with himself. Why could he never remember, until after they parted, that if Delia were like a prickly bur, there was a sound kernel within?

His uncle had asked him to go to see his patient, the landlord of the Edgefield House, and as Richard was coming away when his visit was over, he heard the sound of Viola Mary's banjo, together with fitful snatches of song and occasional peals of loud laughter. As he was passing through the hall on his way to the front door, Madge Leggett, in her flame-colored gown, ran up to him.

"We 're having some music out on the back piazza, and some lemonade and cake," she said. "Won't you stop? Lawrence and Celestine are there."

He declined, for he was meaning to walk over to see old Mrs. Ware, and thank her for the kind note she had written him after his mother's death.

Madge tilted her pretty head, and gave him the full benefit of a flashing glance from her black eyes. "You 're so grand and stuck up," she complained.

"I 've got something else I must do this afternoon, but it is very kind of you to ask me to stay."

"I've felt real bad about your mother," she continued, rushing in where angels feared to tread. "She was real kind and considerate, and not a mite stingy, or fault-finding. I wish you'd stop and hear Viola Mary play. She's got some new pieces. It would do you good to get cheered up and see somebody besides sick folks."

He hesitated. He was very lonely, and her sympathy touched him. The society he was hungry for was lost to him, so why should he not take whatever amusement was offered him?

"You'll stay; that's good," said Madge.

The door opened, and Celestine and Lawrence came forward hand in hand. Richard was repelled by the untidy appearance of her crumpled and soiled blue gown, although at the same time her beauty had never made so strong an appeal to him. Suddenly Richard understood what had once been a sealed book to him. A little shifting of circumstances, a weaker fibre of character, and he might follow in Lawrence's path, step by step.

"I must go to North Edgefield," he said.

As Richard walked along towards the brick house, the dancing river and the sombre woods poignantly recalled that summer afternoon so long ago when he had picked Margaret up on the road and driven her home. How friendly and interested in his life she had seemed! but even then she loved her cousin Philip with all her childish heart.

A red automobile was standing at the gate of the brick house; now that Philip and his mother had come back to Edgefield for the summer, this was frequently seen on the country roads. Richard ground his teeth and cursed the fates which had made him a poor man. The door opened, and Philip and Margaret came out. They were laughing and chatting as gayly as if sorrow were an obsolete fact. At the sight of Richard, Margaret's face grew grave.

"I was going to see your grandmother," he said, "but if she has just seen both of you, she will probably be too tired to see me."

"No, I'm sure she won't. It will do her good. I'll run up and tell her that you are here."

The summer always revived Mrs. Ware, and this afternoon, as she lay back in her reclining-chair by the open window, there was a delicate color in her cheeks, and a light in her eyes.

"It was so good of you to come to see me," she told Richard. She saw the cloud on his brow, but what is the use of the accumulated wisdom of more than fourscore years if it does not teach one to ignore the sign of "No trespassing."

Mrs. Ware went straight to the heart of things. "I loved your mother," she said, "and I have missed her so. She was very good about coming to see me, and she was such a busy woman. She

used to talk a great deal about you. She was very proud of you. She said, 'Richard has never done one thing to cause me anxiety.'

The tears came into his eyes. With a sudden impulse Mrs. Ware put out her hand and clasped his. Richard did not feel ashamed of his tears. There was something loving and human, but at the same time impersonal about this very old woman with her young heart. She must have seen strong men cry generations before he was born.

"Richard," she said, when he was composed again, "I suppose you will think it strange when I tell you that I am happier at eighty-eight, lying quietly here, than I used to be when I was young."

Then he knew, by the quick throb of his heart, that for all he thought he held life so cheap, in reality he held it dear; for when he looked at this frail old woman, he rejoiced in his own youth.

"You have had to go through a great deal in the last six months," she said; "there have been some things that have tried your pride and others that have touched your heart, but believe me when I tell you nothing matters when you get to be my age, if you have kept your conscience clear. I can look back on a life full of disappointment and sorrow, but I do not mind that now. What I do mind is that I used to rebel at fate. Afterwards when it was too late, I knew that God had meant me to get the great things out

of life; the joy of self-sacrifice and the comfort of self-conquest. Life is disappointing at best. It is given to few to be as happy, even for a brief period, as those children who have been to see me this afternoon, but for all of us it means a glorious chance to fight."

She saw that her courage had not been in vain, for the light came into Richard's face, and he flung his head back in his old eager way.

"Look at the successful people," she went on; "they are usually those whose lives have in some way gone askew. Success often comes in spite of some big handicap. We succeed when we care enough to go at things with hammer and tongs, and demand that fate shall be on our side. Richard, you will make a better doctor because life has not gone too smooth."

"May I come and see you sometimes?" Richard asked eagerly, when he bade her good-by.

"It will be such a pleasure to me if you will. I always feel as if that is too much to expect of the young, for youth seeks youth."

"You are more of a comfort than all the young put together," he declared.

Before the summer was over, Richard began to take a stoical kind of satisfaction in his life of hard work. He often went to see old Mrs. Ware, studiously avoiding the subject of her granddaughter, and yet bitterly disappointed when she failed to bring the conversation around to Mar-

garet. One day in the autumn, as Mrs. Ware was looking down at her knitting to pick up a dropped stitch, she let fall the remark that Philip and Margaret were to be married in less than a year without waiting until he had finished the full course in architecture at the Technology. They were to travel in Italy and Switzerland during the summer, and then settle down in Paris, where Philip was to go on with his architectural studies at the Beaux Arts.

Richard suspected that those kind eyes had been purposely lowered so that they could not read the effect of these words. He had been afraid that she suspected his feeling for Margaret; he therefore expressed his pleasure in the news in a somewhat exaggerated way, congratulating himself on the skill with which he deceived her.

A few days later he came unexpectedly upon Margaret. It was a glorious afternoon in October, and Philip had been taking her for a long ride in his automobile. He had stopped somewhat reluctantly at her suggestion to gather wild flowers. Across the road was a small red farmhouse where an old couple lived, who used to be her father's patients, but who, like so many others, had changed doctors, and now had her uncle Gideon.

As she and Philip were picking the blue gentians that grew along the roadside, old Mrs.

Kettell came out of the farmhouse, shading her eyes with her hand. "Is n't this Miss Ware?" she asked.

"Don't call me Miss Ware. You used to call me Peggy."

"Peggy! I want to know! Peggy! If that don't sound like old times. It does my heart good to get a glimpse of you."

"This is my cousin, Philip Bates, Mrs. Kettell; you must know my aunt Nancy."

"So this is Nancy Caldwell's boy! I want to know! He must favor his pa. He don't look a mite like Nancy. Do come in and see father, my husband I mean; he 'll be real pleased to see you both. And I'd like to give you some of the flowers out of my garden. They're much prettier than these wild flowers."

Margaret prepared with forced cheerfulness to go into the stuffy house, while Philip threw her a comical look of mingled resignation and despair, and then quickly fell a prey to the charms of Mrs. Kettell's freckled, ten-year-old grandson, who insisted on showing his new friend the treasures of the barn.

To Margaret's surprise she found all the windows in the kitchen open, and Mr. Kettell lying on a lounge on the back piazza.

"Doctor says father must get all the fresh air he can," said the old woman. "It seems as though everything was turned topsy-turvy with

all these new-fangled ideas, but doctor has pulled father through. Doctor 's so good. If he were his own son, he could n't be kinder. We just love him. He don't put on any airs, for all his eddication. He 's just like one of our own folks. He 's coming this afternoon. I guess that 's his buggy. You know him, don't you, Miss — Peggy?"

"Know him! He 's my uncle!"

"Oh, I don't mean *him*, I mean his assistant, the young doctor. Dr. Baker was never just one of us; he is too grand for that. I guess maybe it 's because Richard Howland was brought up on a farm himself, that he 's so like folks, and lately, since his mother died, it seems though he could n't do enough for us. The other day he stopped and chopped some wood, and lugged in a great pile of it."

Richard was coming out on the piazza now, and Margaret had a strong impulse to get out of his way. She wanted to slip around the house without being seen. She was so peacefully happy, that she did not wish to be brought in close contact with his sorrow. She stood her ground, however. She had longed to comfort this friend of her childhood, and it was cowardly to let this chance slip.

"How do you do, Richard," she said.

"Margaret!" Coming so suddenly upon her, it was a moment before he could get his face back into its usual impassive lines.

She tried to say something more, but he passed her by.

"Doctor, when you get through with father, you 'll find me out in the back yard," said Mrs. Kettell. "There are some questions I want to ask you."

She took Margaret into the garden where a row of sunflowers, dahlias, zinnias, and pink cosmos, and a few late nasturtiums and salvia were making a gay discord of color.

Richard's professional visit was over before there was any sign of Philip, and so Margaret was still in the garden when Richard went out to see Mrs. Kettell. He was touched as he watched the old woman gather a bunch of ill-assorted flowers for the girl who looked down at her with such a charming air of gratitude. The red maples and the yellow beeches and bronze of the oaks made an autumn background for the two figures: the one bent and wrinkled, wearing a rusty black gown, and with thin white locks escaping below the knitted shawl she had hastily thrown over her head; the other, erect and with the grace of youth, in warm russet brown, and with yellow hair, and delicately tinted cheeks.

Margaret took her ungainly bunch of flowers and walked quickly away, so as to be out of hearing of the two voices, but the conference was a brief one, and Richard soon joined her.

"Do you want to come out to the barn?" he

asked. "I expect Benny is showing Philip his rabbits."

"No. Let's sit on this bench and wait for Philip, if you can spare the time." She put her nosegay down on the seat between them. There were samples in it of every flower that grew in Mrs. Kettell's garden, for she was as impartial as the loving mother of many differing children, and the stocky sunflower was quite as dear to her heart as the delicate cosmos.

Margaret looked down at her flowers with a little smile. "I expect Philip will say, 'What on earth possessed you to let her give you such a mixture?'"

"If you want to get rid of them, I'll take them. Now that Eloise is away and Mrs. Hart is at the helm, father and I have no one to criticise us, and I am such a barbarian that I really like a lot of different colored flowers."

"Did you think I wanted to get rid of them when she was so kind as to give them to me? I love them all, too. Philip will have to get used to my ways. I have always brought back choice treasures ever since I took home an apronful of polliwogs. Poor mother has had a hard time of it with father and me."

A silence fell between them. Margaret was trying to find courage to express the sympathy that was in her heart, but there was a look in his face that made her feel that he had gone through

an experience so deep and so tragic that she, with all her imagination, could not divine it. She had felt so happy earlier in the afternoon, and now, as she looked at the strongly marked lines on Richard's face, she suddenly remembered that this gay and cheerful autumn world was the scene of pain and death, and that he had deliberately chosen to give his life to help the suffering. Her own joyous existence seemed filled with trifles.

Some English sparrows lighted in the roadside not far away, and began their saucy twittering, as if the great world had been made especially as the theatre for their small affairs. They did not lack the courage to speak.

"Richard," Margaret began shyly, "I felt so sorry for you when your mother died. I don't know how I could bear it if I were to lose my mother. It was terribly hard for the others, but it was hardest for you, for you had always been so devoted to her."

He looked at her sympathetic face and the impulse for confession was strong upon him; they might never have a chance for an intimate talk again, and yet he could not bear to see her shrink away from him, as she had once done when she was a little child. He thought of his mother, and of her courage in telling him the truth which she might have concealed, and he knew that he could not let Margaret go through life thinking him better than he was.

“What I was to mother was more than counter-balanced by the way I failed her in the last hours of her life,” he began. He paused. It seemed impossible to choose the words in which to proceed. “I once told you that I had a terrible temper,” he went on. “We had words about something, mother and I. Yes, I, a doctor, who knew the effect of excitement on her disease, said cruel things to her, my mother.” He was silent again. “You know the rest,” he added in a low tone. “That night she died, and I felt I had killed her as surely as if I had done it with my own hand.”

He had said it, and he felt as if the revelation should have been followed by some portent of nature, but the sun still shone blithely through the autumn trees, and the sparrows still twittered on the dusty road. At last he gathered courage to look at Margaret, in whose face he expected to see shuddering aversion.

The tears were slowly falling down her cheeks. “Poor Richard! How you must have suffered, and all for nothing, all for a morbid fancy.”

“But you don’t understand. She might have had months, perhaps years of life except for me.”

“Richard, promise me that you will try to forget that night, and to remember the years of happy life you gave your mother. Uncle Gideon said she would have died long before if it had not been for your constant watchfulness and care;

and at the last it was not you, alone, who caused the attack. Delia told me that your mother seemed very much excited by a scene she had with Uncle Gideon, and then she went over the stairs, and that must have done her harm."

"She had not been over the stairs for months."

"Yes, she had. Father and I saw her in the doorway the morning before she died, and when father told her he was glad to see her downstairs, she swore us to secrecy, and said she was tucked up on the lounge upstairs, where you had left her. She seemed just like a naughty little girl," and Margaret smiled through her tears.

He smiled, too. "I can't tell you what it is to me to know that," he said; "you have taken a load off my heart. I can never thank you enough."

In the distance Margaret heard the merry sound of childish laughter, and then Philip's voice, gay and unconcerned. With a rush of gratitude she realized that life was full of peaceful happiness for her. The two figures were coming towards them, hand in hand, across the yellowing grass.

"How well Philip looks," Richard said. "Who would think he had ever been a delicate boy?"

"Yes, an out-of-door life has been the making of him. Richard," she added abruptly, for in a moment more they would be interrupted, "I want

to thank you for all you have been to father, and to tell you, what perhaps he never has, how highly he rates your ability. 'There is some one who is going to be head and shoulders above us one of these days; I am getting ready to take off my hat to him,' he said once to Uncle Gideon. 'What on earth have you ever done, Gideon Baker, that the Lord should give you such an assistant?' Richard, will you promise that you will often go to see father this winter? It will be terribly lonely for him, for mother and I are to go to Grandmother Lancaster's the middle of November, and we are to stay until April. Grandmother Lancaster has an incurable disease, and this is her last winter, I am afraid, so mother feels that she must be with her. I begged to be allowed to stay with father for part of the time, but mother and Philip will not hear of it. I mean to come home, all the same, for a little visit now and then. Richard, I can trust you to let me know if father is n't well, or if he misses me, so that I can come straight back? Will you promise?"

"Yes, I will promise."

"Well, of all people on earth you are the last I expected to run across this afternoon," Philip said to Richard. "I'm mighty glad to see you. You have been making yourself terribly scarce of late. The only way to get hold of you is to be seriously ill, and even that would n't do me any good, because I'd be in honor bound to have

Uncle Edmund. Jump in, Peggy; it is getting late. We ought to be going."

He gave a quizzical look at her flowers, but postponed his comments out of consideration for Mrs. Kettell's grandson.

"You promised you 'd take me for a ride in the red devil," Benny reminded him.

"I did n't know we were going to stay here so long. I'll take you a piece down the road, though, and you can walk back. Get in, sonny; you can sit in the middle."

Richard stood watching them as they whirled away. Philip never seemed more winning than when in the company of a child. As he and Margaret turned to speak to each other across Benny's flaxen head, Richard felt how rough and unpolished he was in comparison with his friend. A great wave of tenderness came over him, as he thought of Margaret in the coming years. If Philip would only make her happy, he could in time teach himself to be glad for her. If he never saw her again, the knowledge that she was shedding her sympathy and gracious friendliness on all who crossed her path would be enough to illumine his prosaic life. He felt that he had come out of a dark cave into a blaze of light. He no longer thought of love as a torment and a pain; it had once more become a spiritual force, and to love hopelessly seemed but the inevitable stage in his development towards better things. He

would do work in the world, of which Margaret should be proud.

Meanwhile the red automobile had vanished into the distance, and a little later Benny was trudging sturdily homeward.

“Poor old Richard!” said Philip; “how a fellow like that misses the joy of life.”

CHAPTER XXIV

SEPARATION

IN November Mrs. Ware and Margaret went to Boston for the winter. Madam Lancaster, who was sure this was her last Thanksgiving, had a large family party, including Dr. Ware, who came down to it somewhat reluctantly. Alice's grandmother had made all her preparations for death with the same methodical dignity with which she had formerly prepared for life. She told Alice that her house on Beacon Hill was to go to her. Madam Lancaster had outlived her children, and not one of her grandchildren was so dear to her as Alice, or would so appreciate this house filled with its rare treasures.

On Thanksgiving Day, as Edmund glanced at the row of family portraits in the drawing-room, and looked at the Common through the purple windows, he had his old feeling of being stifled in too close an atmosphere. And after her grandmother's death, it was in this house that Alice proposed he should live during at least five months of the year for the rest of his life! He might postpone the evil day, but he was getting older, and this long separation every winter from those he loved best was telling on him. He was sure he should capitulate in time.

This autumn had been an exciting one in Edgefield circles, for the strong feeling against Gideon Patrick Baker had not been placated by his giving up all claim to the Edgefield House. On the contrary, there were many persons who felt that Kate's course had been the more spirited. If she had done wrong, she had been willing to pay the full penalty, and had sinned with her eyes open and for her children's sake. Having formerly put Dr. Baker on a high pedestal, they now pulled him down and set him in a lower place than he deserved. It was said on all sides that he tried to screen himself, first, behind the landlord of the Edgefield House and Gus Leggett, and then behind his niece, Kate Howland; and that when all these shelters failed, he hoped to impress the public by giving up all claim to the property. The public, however, declared that it had no intention of being hoodwinked; and therefore several of his patients, who believed in total abstinence, gave him up and went back to Dr. Ware, who refused to take them, professional etiquette and the honor of the family both being at stake; when they grew very hot in their denunciations of Gideon Baker, Edmund finally advised them to try the doctor's assistant, Richard Howland.

Dr. Baker had decided to leave this ungrateful community for a time and take his wife and daughter to Europe. He did not mean to go at

once, for that would have the appearance of flight, but before summer he hoped to set sail for foreign shores. If he were to attend a course of lectures in Paris and Berlin, and Delia were to visit some of the larger hospitals, they would both come home with renewed prestige. But it was dear Sophia's welfare that he had principally at heart. She deserved the pleasures of a European trip. He had been putting by money year after year for this purpose, and although his conscience had made it seem advisable to give up all share in the Edgefield House, it allowed him to keep the money already acquired. He could see himself, with his jaunty air of self-confidence restored, traveling through the capitals of Europe with his beloved wife and daughter, enjoying the well-earned holiday of the worker. He never saw Edmund Ware without congratulating himself on what he termed his own "domestic felicity." Edmund was looking fagged and depressed, as Gideon pointed out to Sophia. "We must ask the poor fellow to dinner twice a week," he added benevolently.

It was from her aunt Nancy that Margaret had the first intimation that the winter was a hard one for her father. Nancy had gone for a few days to stay with Edmund's mother just after Christmas, and he had come in one afternoon more depressed than she had ever seen him. His mother had a heavy cold, and Edmund feared

that it might develop into pneumonia. He and Nancy were together by the open fire in the sitting-room, while Marcia was upstairs with her mother.

When he first saw Nancy in the distance, in her large black hat and furs, he thought she was his Peggy. He felt so like his old self during that happy instant that he realized sharply the difference between his past and present.

"I am just going for a walk through the old wood road," she told him. "Won't you come with me?"

"It seems a hundred years since I walked there with you, Nancy. I can't even remember when the last time was. It must have been before you were grown up."

He had forgotten that last walk they had taken together after his engagement, when he had said that his new love would make no difference in his brotherly feeling for her. Nancy remembered, and she thought a little wistfully that the years had failed to bring the open evidences of the truth of these words, but her faith in him was so great that she never doubted his sincere affection.

"It is cold out of doors," he said; "let us stay by the fire in the sitting-room while Marcia is upstairs with mother. You can get your walk afterwards."

There was always such an air of comfortable

good cheer about Nancy that Edmund felt his burden lighten as he looked at her.

"I don't think you need be so worried about your mother," Nancy said; "she had a worse cold last winter."

"I know it, but she is a year older. When I think that she will be eighty-nine next April, and that I can't expect to keep her at the best but a few years longer, I can't help trembling for the future. I used to be able to cast care to the four winds. That's the only way in which I feel any older than I did twenty years ago. Black Care comes and rides with me every day, in the place where Peggy used to be. I feel when my mother goes and when Peggy is married, as if the joy of life would be over for me."

"I don't feel in that way about Philip's marriage; I feel as if I were beginning life all over again with him and Margaret."

He gave his dry little laugh. "There's a big difference, allow me to remark. If you think your will-o'-the-wisp of a son is going to be as great a comfort to me as my adorable daughter will be to you, you must have the blindness that is proverbial in the case of mother love. By the way, your eyes are all right again, are n't they, Nancy?"

"They are much better. I am allowed to use them two hours a day, now."

"Only two hours a day?" And she was always

so uncomplaining. After all she had her trials in spite of her cheerfulness of manner and her large fortune.

“Margaret loves you almost as much as she loves her mother,” he continued, “and I don’t grudge you her affection. I only wish your boy felt equally fond of me. Do you want to know the way he regards me? He’s too polite to say it to my face, but I know it just as well as if he put it into words. He thinks of me as an old chap, quite out of the running, who is still hankering after the joys of youth, and has none of the dignity that middle age should bring. He thinks of me as a failure; a man with brains enough to have amounted to twice as much, but who, either from indolence, or through the force of circumstances, has made a mess of life. And, by Jove, Nancy, he’s right!”

“He does n’t think anything of the kind; he’s very fond of you.”

“He’s too busy and too happy to have wasted any thoughts on me, I acknowledge, but what I said is God’s truth, Nancy, and you know it. Did n’t you expect I was going to make more of my life, when we were boy and girl?”

She hesitated for a moment. She had often wondered why it was that with her cousin’s charm of heart and mind, and with the good gifts that life had brought him, there should yet be something lacking, which gave her the

impression that he was not altogether a happy man.

“You ought n’t to feel like that,” she said. “If you have not succeeded, who has? Think of how much good you have done in your profession, and think, Edmund, what you have been in the lives of four women.”

“Four?”

“Yes; your mother, and your wife, and your daughter. Oh, I ought to have said six, for there are your two sisters. There are very few men or women who are able to command the sort of devotion that people give you.”

“You ’ve only mentioned five names, Nancy. Who is the sixth?”

“You know, Edmund; you know I have always cared as much for you as if you were my brother.”

His eyes softened as he looked at her. Dear little Nancy, who had sometimes bored him by her devotion when they were children; but in looking back, those hours now seemed fraught with a poignant charm.

“I know what ’s the matter with you, Edmund; you ’re homesick for your wife and daughter. You ought to have come down at Christmas. We were all so disappointed.”

“Were you? To tell you the truth, Thanksgiving was too much for me. Madam Lancaster always treats me like a day laborer, who may relapse into his native manners at any moment;

she takes care to place me where I shall not come in contact with any of her sacred Lancasters."

"How absurd you are! She put you between Margaret and me because she knew we were both so anxious to see you."

"I suppose I shall often be sitting at the foot of that table in the years to come," he said with a sigh. "You must think me very selfish to hold out so long for my independence, when I have so little to show for it. I am well aware that many of my patients have left me for Gideon Patrick, and that Jack is competent to take excellent care of the rest of them. Perhaps it is selfishness, Nancy, but upon my word I have believed it to be loyalty to my old hopes and expectations. A man is slow to admit that he is old enough to be put on the shelf."

"You are just in your prime," she assured him warmly, "and you know perfectly well how your patients feel about you. If you do not think that you can go to your wife and daughter, I shall write and beg one of them to come to you. This lonely life is very bad for you."

"You 'll do nothing of the kind. It 's Alice's last winter with her grandmother. This year I really feel it 's her duty to be there, and she would miss Margaret even more than I do, if they were separated; and besides, Margaret's heart is wrapped up in that confounded boy of yours."

Nevertheless, in spite of Edmund's prohibition, Nancy wrote to Margaret, saying that her father was very anxious about his mother, and asking if she could not come home for a few days, for she was sure her father missed her.

Margaret was eager to go, but when she showed the letter to Philip, he uttered the expressive monosyllable, "Rats! If that is n't just like my mother," he went on; "she can never see but one point of view. Your father misses you, does he? Of course I should n't miss you, if you were to go, and your mother would n't, and your grandmother Lancaster. You mean to say that you really were planning to rush off on the spur of the moment, when two dinners are being given for us?"

"I did n't mean to go till after the Fords' dinner. The Grays are n't giving theirs for us, so we could both drop out."

"Why on earth does n't your father come to Boston, if he wants to see you?"

"He can't get away; he's terribly worried about Grandmother Ware. I'm sure I could cheer them up if I were to go home for a few days."

"My dear little girl, it's lucky that you've got a strong, heartless character like me to tie to, or I don't know where you'd be. Your heart is entirely out of proportion to the rest of your body. What with your loving your father and your mother, and your two grandmothers, Delia, and

a host of lesser cousins, and friends, male and female, my mother, your aunts, and your uncle Gideon, unhappy, downtrodden worm, I don't know what a poor fellow is going to do who will merely be your husband. It will be a joyful day for me, Miss Margaret Ware, when after having promised to love me 'for better, for worse,' you leave the whole gang behind, and sail with me to foreign shores. Only I suppose on the steamer you 'll find a few loving hearts. How I wish we could go over in a balloon! Still, I suppose the chauffeur — the aëronaut, I mean — would have something about him to call out your sympathies. He 'd probably be a lone orphan who 'd just lost his mother."

Margaret laughed with Philip and tried to think that her forebodings were foolish. If there had been any reason for serious anxiety, Richard would have written to her. She did not enjoy the ensuing dinners, however, with a free mind. She could not help worrying about her father; and she and Philip had plunged into so much gayety that she was feeling tired, and longed for a little breathing-space. Finally, her aunt Marcia wrote, saying that her grandmother Ware was very much pulled down by her cold, and longed for a sight of her bright, young face. Could she not come home for a Sunday, at least? Perhaps Philip would come with her?

The next mail brought a few lines from Richard,

who said that having promised to let her know if her father needed her, he wrote to tell her that he seemed careworn and worried. Richard did not think there was any immediate need of her coming back, but he was sure that a few days of her cheerful society would do a great deal for her father. This letter decided Margaret, and without waiting to consult Philip this time, she packed up her dress-suit case, and told her mother that she was going home to spend Sunday.

"Grandmother is worse and wants to see me," she said, showing her aunt Marcia's letter. "You can tell Philip."

"But, Margaret, you 'll miss the dance Monday night, or do you mean to come back in time for that?"

Alice's breath had been quite taken away by her daughter's independent action.

"The dance can go to grass!" said Margaret.

After reaching Edgefield, Margaret tiptoed into the house without giving her father any warning, and the delight in his face as he glanced up from his book repaid her for the journey. She perched on the arm of his Morris chair, and kissed him again and again. "I wonder if people always seem a hundred times dearer if we are away from them for a while?" she said. "I don't know what I shall do without you, when I am in Paris."

"Sweetheart, do you think that impertinent

youngster, who has stolen you away from me, is going to make up to you for the loss of such a wise parent as I am?"

"Honestly, father, I am not sure. When you and mother were going abroad on your wedding journey, did you feel as if you would like to take your mother and her grandmother with you?" she asked mischievously.

"Good heavens, no!"

"Because that's the way I feel sometimes. Europe seems so far from home, and I think how nice it would be if only we could take Aunt Nancy, and you, and mother along to take care of us. I feel as if we were just two children. Philip says I have no idea how happy we shall be. He says he is going to give me a deep draught of the joy of life. A deep draught of the joy of life, father," she repeated the words dreamily. "Do you suppose there is any such thing? I believe we never get more than a few sips at a time."

"Why, Margaret, what has come over you? You have always seemed the happiest creature in the world. You mean the joy of life to me."

"Yes, I know. I don't mean that kind. I love life, but I can never feel its pure joy as I used to, for just as I am the happiest, something happens to some one I love, and where is the joy of life then? If Grandmother Ware dies when I am abroad, will all the pleasures of Paris cure my

crazy longing to come straight home and comfort you?"

"Your duty will be to your husband then; you will love him so much that you will only feel the shadow of a sorrow. You will think 'it is hard for poor father, but he has had his days of youth.'"

"You talk just as Philip does. You are alike in lots of ways. Father, I am sometimes afraid of life — for me and Philip. He loves beauty, and gayety, and health. What will happen if I live to be an old, old woman with my health and good spirits gone?"

"He 'll be a very old man, himself, then."

"He 'll never be too old to want to be amused. Father, you all of you want such a lot of entertainment. Many a time when you 've come in, and found mother and me too busy to bother much about you, you 've looked bored and put on your hat and gone out. Now if I ever begin to bore Philip, I am going to put on *my* hat! I am not going to make myself miserable if Philip stops caring for me in the way he does now. Don't look shocked, father; I don't mean I shall fall in love with some one else, or that I shall walk away from him forever; I shall simply put on my hat!"

"Oh, little Peggy, you have the wisdom of the serpent, for all you look as innocent as the dove. If you have the sense to put on your hat, Philip will never get bored. By the way, perhaps you 'll want to put on your hat to-night. I did n't

know you were coming and I asked Richard Howland to drop in. I can telephone to him not to come."

"Oh, no, I shall like to see him."

She had not thought of this delightful possibility and she went singing around the house as she tried to find some frock to wear in celebration of this holiday. In the chest of drawers in the linen closet her summer gowns had been put away by her mother's careful hands. She tossed over the contents as if a cyclone were sweeping through them. Margaret, like her father, was always in too great a hurry to be patient. Alas! they were all merely rough dried. No, here was her white pongee.

She found everything in perfect order about the house; even the plants were blooming. Their two good maids were devoted to Dr. Ware's comfort.

At this point Philip called her to the telephone. He was so disturbed by her departure that she had great difficulty in placating him. Her conduct was particularly exasperating, because he had planned an automobile trip for the week end, to celebrate his mother's birthday. He had only just thought of the idea, and rushed around to Madam Lancaster's to secure his aunt and cousin, only to be met by this knock-down blow.

"You 'd better come to Edgefield instead," she

told him, "and I'll go with you next week. It's so good to be at home with father," she added.

Her impenitence, and above all the happy ring in her voice, caused him to say conclusively: "I'll have to go this week, or not at all. Next week I must buckle down and work hard at the Tech. Mother has set her heart on the trip and it is n't fair to disappoint her. You can't have your cake and eat it, too, young lady."

"Of course you must go if it's your only chance. I would n't disappoint Aunt Nancy for anything in the world."

Margaret and her father had the happiest meal together. She had gone out and returned with golden oranges and bunches of purple grapes, and she toasted his bread for him before the open fire.

Meanwhile Philip had gone home in a thoroughly disgusted frame of mind. Margaret had been more than inconsiderate in slipping away without consulting him, and if she could go off at half cock now to gratify the whim of her grandmother, what was he to expect after they were married? He wondered gloomily whether she would be capable of spending four months of the year away from him. He had always thought it a delightful arrangement for his aunt Alice to be in Boston with Margaret until this moment.

Philip had told his mother that he should not be at home to dinner, for he was sure he should be asked to stay and dine with Margaret. When he was in good spirits, his mother's unflagging devotion often tried him, but if things went wrong, he sought her society as swiftly as he used to do when he was a small boy and wanted to have his bruises kissed.

As he went into the dining-room he heard voices and remembered with annoyance that it was one of Eloise Howland's afternoons to write for his mother. "Eloise always contrives to dawdle over her work whenever she is here towards lunch time or dinner time," he thought. "I wonder mother does not see through that girl. She's a regular social climber."

Eloise was looking unusually well this winter. Her sorrow gave a touch of softness to the somewhat hard lines of her face, and her deep mourning aroused chivalrous pity. She looked so suited to her surroundings that before dinner was over, Philip found himself thinking, "After all, cream is a social climber. One can't expect it to stay at the bottom of the pan when it feels more at home at the top."

Eloise always felt in her element when she dined with Nancy. She secretly longed to possess everything she saw, from the silver candlesticks with their red shades, to her hostess's trailing gray gown and creamy lace. It was a

pity Mrs. Bates was plain and middle-aged, and found it such an effort to keep house according to Philip's elaborate standard. Eloise had a vivid picture of herself in these surroundings, and then she thought how well this setting would become Margaret, and how like life it was that her friend, who was equally happy in her old serge and white sweater, planting potatoes, was to help to spend this large fortune, while she, who would have known so well how to use it, had to live in a dingy boarding-house and earn her bread and butter.

Eloise knew that Philip was disappointed to find her there, and she set herself to work to discover the cause of his low spirits and remove it. Before they had finished their dessert, he was telling his troubles to his mother almost as freely as if Eloise had not been present.

"I am glad Margaret has gone home," Nancy said, "for I am sure they need her there, but she ought of course to have let you know she was going."

"Peggy is always so impulsive," Eloise observed. "I don't suppose she stopped to think how Philip would feel."

"That 's just it," he agreed. Philip knew her well enough to realize the exact value of her sympathy, but it was so pleasant to be stroked the right way, that he proceeded with his grievances.

He told of the delightful automobile trip that he

had planned, and described Salisbury, the restful little spot in the Berkshires that seemed like a bit of old England. He continued the subject while they were sipping their coffee in the drawing-room. He depicted the winter sports, dwelling enthusiastically upon the skating and skeeing. "I am going just the same, with mother and Aunt Alice; it is n't fair to disappoint you, mother."

"You must n't consider me; we can postpone the trip till a little later."

"No, I 'll have to be grinding away at the Tech, then, and the Salisbury fellows will be back in college. I 'm going, if I have to go alone, but the spice will all be taken out of it without Peggy."

"Of course it will," said Eloise, sympathetically; "I am so sorry for you. It is such a different thing when Peggy is around." She paused. "Don't you go through New Hartford on the way to Salisbury?" she asked.

"Yes."

"My mother's people came from New Hartford. Richard is of a genealogical turn of mind, and he promised to take me there some time to see the graves of our Marchant ancestors; but he is so busy now, I am afraid we shall never get there."

Philip's mother was called to the telephone at this point, greatly to her vexation, for when Eloise mentioned the graves of her ancestors,

Nancy perceived that she meant to go on the automobile trip, and to mean to do a thing with Eloise, was usually to accomplish it. As Nancy was coming back from the telephone, she heard: "Your aunt does n't like me. My going would spoil the trip for her."

"I don't care a hang whether it would or not. I did n't get up the trip to please my aunt. I thought she and mother could play together while Peggy and I amused ourselves."

Nancy felt that she must use all her diplomacy to keep Eloise from going on the excursion. She wished she had more of the quality in question, but she felt like a guileless child in comparison with her young secretary.

"I have been telling Eloise that there will be an extra seat in the automobile; we can take her along and stop for lunch at New Hartford, if we make an early start."

"I have been telling Philip that I can't think of going," said Eloise, conclusively.

Nancy almost felt that she had done her an injustice.

"Perhaps some other time you can go with us," she suggested politely.

"There's no time like the present," said Philip, whose desires were always whetted by opposition. "You ask her, mother; she won't come for my asking."

"I could n't think of going, unless I could be of

some use to you, Mrs. Bates. If you care to be working on those reports while Philip is busy, that would be another matter."

"Yes, mother, you'd better take along your report for the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to the Male Sex, and the Kindergarten for Débutantes."

"Philip, you incorrigible boy!" his mother exclaimed. "He makes up a fresh name for each of my pet charities every day."

There was a little more skirmishing between the young people and another appeal from Philip, and then to her intense surprise Nancy found herself giving Eloise a formal invitation to go to Salisbury with them; and, moreover, the whole object of the excursion now seemed to be, to give her a chance to make out her reports free from the constant interruptions of town.

Philip insisted on walking home with Eloise, although she protested that a working girl, like herself, was in the habit of going about alone in the evening. It was only eight o'clock, and but a five minutes' walk to her boarding-house.

"If you have n't any engagement for to-night, Philip, perhaps we can go on with 'Notre Dame de Paris,'" his mother suggested.

Philip had an excellent French accent, and in a moment of rash generosity he had proposed reading this classic aloud to her. They had be-

gun it two years ago, and whenever his conscience troubled him concerning the many lonely hours his mother spent, he consoled himself by reflecting that he did not know any other fellow who would read French aloud to his mother.

In spite of many a past experience, Nancy flattered herself that Philip would come straight home, but an hour passed and he did not appear. She wondered a little drearily why it was that she had so slight a hold on her son. She had been too great a favorite to escape the knowledge that she had an attraction for some people; but for her boy, for whom she would gladly have given up society and friends, she was conscious that she was but a plain, middle-aged woman, lacking in charm. She was sure that Philip loved her in spite of her defects, but his feeling was not of the absorbing nature of her intense devotion for him. She could imagine no joy greater than an hour spent alone with her boy. To listen to the rich tones of his voice, and to watch the mobile lines on his handsome young face, was a constant delight to her. But his restless spirit chafed under the monotony of life with her, and he found a casual call on a girl like Eloise more stimulating, although he only half liked her, and did not wholly trust her. Nancy acknowledged that it was natural, and she was too generous to try to curtail Philip's freedom in any way. He should never feel that she was a drag on him.

Therefore when she heard Philip's latch-key a little after half past nine, she merely said, "I suppose if we are to start so early to-morrow, we had better not sit up any longer."

As Philip heard her gentle, uncomplaining voice, he had a feeling of self-contempt. It was speedily followed, however, by the reflection that if his mother had been a little more exacting, he would have had no cause for self-reproach. Eloise had been as clever as the devil in adapting herself to him, he thought bitterly. She told him, among other things, how she wished she were in her own parlor, and she would have insisted on his smoking.

"I've let up on cigarettes for the present. Peggy thinks they are not good for me," he said.

"Yes?" Eloise's voice conveyed the idea that Peggy was unreasonable. "That is so dear and old-fashioned of Peggy, in these days when so many women, as well as men, smoke. No, I don't smoke; I expect you were going to ask me that. It does not seem to me quite feminine."

He tried to remember why he had gone inside that dreary boarding-house. Eloise had told him she could not ask him in, because there were three old cats whose great joy it was to gossip, who would be sure to listen to every word they said. As it happened, however, he and Eloise had the back parlor to themselves. Philip had never been more in love with Margaret than

he was while he laughed and chatted with Eloise. His temporary aberration, as he felt sure she realized, was the measure of his wounded vanity and his anger against his cousin. Well, the evening was over and he meant that there should be no more of them. Dear little Peggy! It was all her fault, for if she had not gone away so suddenly, they would have been sitting together, hand in hand, in Madam Lancaster's drawing-room. How he longed to be married! then there would be no more of these racking partings. He wondered how his adorable Peggy had been spending the time. Had the knowledge that he was far away cast a shadow on her first evening at home?

At that moment Margaret was listening to the grave talk of her father and Richard, as they discussed an article in the Medical Journal. Her father seldom looked at her, and yet she was vividly conscious that the light in his eyes and the eager tones of his voice were due to the fact that she was there.

Richard had built up the fire and the logs were crackling cheerfully. Everything spoke of comfort. Even the maltese cat, who had not deigned to honor Dr. Ware with her company, was purring contentedly as she lay stretched out on the tablecloth close by her young mistress.

Margaret had not felt so like her old self for weeks. "This," she thought, "is the joy of life."

CHAPTER XXV

AT THE EDGEFIELD HOUSE

THE next morning Margaret's father took her to her grandmother Ware's to spend the day. He was to drive over and bring her home, and they were to pick up Delia on the way back, who was to take supper with them.

Margaret and her grandmother always had as delightful a time together as if they were the same age. There was no one else who liked to hear every detail of her life; for with the girls of her own age she had to do a great deal of listening.

It began to snow early in the afternoon, so Dr. Ware put extra wraps into the sleigh for Margaret. He made a few professional calls on his way, finally stopping at the Edgefield House to see his patient, old Mrs. Griffith. She and her daughter were almost the only boarders who had stayed on through all the changes that had come there of late, for she was bed-ridden. They were quiet, hard-working people who had once seen better days. The daughter, who used to go out as a seamstress, now took in sewing. They were always given to seeing the dark side, and their extreme neatness gave them

much reason for finding fault with the management of the hotel.

"It seems 's though things had gone from bad to worse ever since Mrs. Howland died," Mrs. Griffith remarked. "Since Dr. Baker has given up the property, there 's no responsible person. I hear that Richard and Eloise don't want to have anything to do with the place, and that it will go to Lawrence."

"He 's living here now, is n't he?" Dr. Ware asked.

"Oh, yes, he 's living here, putting on the grand airs of a landlord. His little wife, if Eunice can catch her, sometimes comes in to sweep and dust our room; but it 's just a lick and a promise. Eunice has to go all over it herself. I guess there 's no doubt but what it 's easy enough to get whiskey, if you want it, in this establishment, in spite of the place being raided and their having to pay such a big fine. But if you want hot water, you can't get it for love or money. Yesterday I rang my bell four times and nobody came. Mrs. Leggett is a little deaf, and she was out in the shed, and the girls were all off gallivanting somewhere, so Eunice had to go down herself and heat some water."

"That 's outrageous! where are the servants?"

"They all left at the time of the raid, and Maria can't get any who will stay."

"Don't you want your hot-water bag filled now? I'll take it down. It will do my heart good to give the Leggetts a piece of my mind."

"Oh, don't bother yourself, doctor," said Eunice, glancing up wearily from her sewing. "I don't mind the stairs. I expect the Leggett girls have all gone to the rummage sale."

"Confound the rummage sale!" Dr. Ware exclaimed. "Every hideous thing in town, instead of being decently burned, is changing hands, and will keep on being an eye-sore for another hundred years."

When he had prescribed for his patient, the doctor went down in search of hot water. He passed through the deserted office to the ell of the house, and just before reaching the kitchen he heard Gus Leggett's boisterous laugh. Pushing open a door, he saw Gus and his crony, Jerry McKnight, lingering at a table, which had been partly cleared. There was a bottle of whiskey in front of Gus, and both men had flushed faces.

"Look here," and Dr. Ware swooped down on Gus, "this thing has got to stop. If you can't attend to the guests of this house, I'll tell people what sort of a temperance hotel you're keeping, and you'll get kicked out."

Gus, who had been drinking hard, rose quickly. "Take that for your insolence, and that, and that, and that."

Blow after blow rained on the doctor's defenseless head, dazing him so that it was a moment before he could recover enough to try to defend himself.

"You think you can tell any damned lies you like, and I'll never hit back, you white-livered, tow-headed cuss! You come spyin' round here like a sneak, and then you go away and blab! But you've tried that game once too often."

Jerry McKnight got up unsteadily from the table. He had no grudge himself against the doctor, and he liked to see fair play, yet he did not want to antagonize Gus in his present condition. The two men were now having a hand-to-hand struggle. Presently Gus felled Dr. Ware to the ground, as if he had been a tree in the forest, and then kicked him with his heavy hob-nailed boot, uttering a volley of oaths.

"I'll get kicked out, will I? You —— —— ——! You'll teach me, will you, how to keep the Edgefield House? You can close your damned lips for one while."

The door opened and Lawrence rushed in. "What's the trouble?" he demanded. Then looking with horror at Dr. Ware's pale face, he gasped out, "My God! He's dead!"

Gus, shocked and sobered, cried stubbornly, "He ain't dead, he's just had a lesson."

Lawrence stooped down and was chafing the doctor's cold hands, and listening for the beat-

ing of his heart. A quiver passed over Dr. Ware's face, and he slowly opened his eyes.

"You see he ain't dead," Gus repeated doggedly. "Folks like him don't die so easy."

Lawrence, blazing with anger, turned on his father-in-law, and spoke a few short, sharp words.

Gus, awed by that look on his enemy's face, muttered something about having wanted to get even with him. Lawrence leaned over and tenderly raised the doctor's head.

"We must get him out of here. Jerry, will you help me carry him upstairs? Celestine, go up and get the south front room ready, and you, Madge, can telephone to Uncle Gideon."

The two girls, in their snow-besprinkled finery, were standing shocked and paralyzed in the hall.

In an incredibly short time Dr. Baker arrived with his daughter and took command.

"I thought we might need a nurse," he said blandly, "so I brought Delia along."

In the sick room he wrote out some messages hastily.

"Lawrence, you can send these telegrams to Mrs. Ware and Philip Bates in Boston. Richard has gone to the Browns' in North Edgefield this afternoon. See if you can't get him by telephoning to the Winfield Hewletts'. Tell him the state of the case, and ask him to stop at Mrs. Ware's and break the news to Margaret. She'd better

stay at her grandmother's for the night. Ask Jack Murray to come here as quick as he can."

He gave his orders in the important whisper which had always been so irritating to his brother-in-law. Many a time when Edmund had been called in to one of his cases as consulting doctor, Gideon's whisper had gone on his nerves, and he had thanked heaven that he was not the patient. And now, as Edmund struggled feebly back to life, and his weary eyes took in all the details of this unfamiliar room, he longed for strength to find words in which to tell his bustling brother-in-law to go about his business and send him Richard Howland. He tried in vain to frame the one word, "Richard."

Twilight was coming on, and as he looked out of the window near his bed he saw the snow-flakes falling in an inexorable succession. He felt the vast expanse of nature with its fixed laws, and the isolation of man, for he was alone, in spite of the hovering figures in the room with whom he could hold no communication; he was alone with a shrouded future and an insistent past. His clouded mind went back over the long years to that other winter night when he had met Gus Leggett, and ungraciously gone with him to his wretched hovel in the blinding snow, and he was sure that his enemy had been lying in wait for him through all the intervening years. To his excited brain there appeared the vision of Gus's face,

now distorted by a leer, and then by a vindictive look. The face grew larger and larger, then it changed; was Gus his enemy or was he being pursued by an enemy more universal, the unseen enemy, death? His enemy! the words had a half-familiar sound; he was struggling with some idea. He was clearer now; it seemed as if he were getting a glimpse of the edge of the skirt of an idea, as it whisked around the corner. He felt that it was a great original thought, that every man is his own worst enemy. This was profoundly true, for if Gus had been his enemy, Gus had been most of all his own foe. For years he had been an idle ne'er-do-weel; no wonder that such a man, bearing about with him the desire for murder, had given way at last to a sudden temptation. But if this great discovery were true of Gus, it must be true also of other men. He lapsed off into drowsiness every now and then, but waking or sleeping, he kept a firm grip on this marvelous discovery. Had Gideon Baker been his own worst enemy? Surely! He had been deposed by the people from a lofty place simply because he had fallen away from his old standards of right. And how was it with Lawrence Howland? Yes, he, poor boy, had been his own worst enemy. Was it not true of women, too? Had not poor Kate Howland, yielding to her love of money and of power, wrecked her life in the end? Finally he came to the women in his own

household. Was his daughter going to make a great mistake, as her aunt Nancy had done, through the gentleness of her heart and her desire to be loved? And Alice? He paused. Alice was the one perfect woman in a world of sinners. Yet, perhaps if her sympathies had been broader, if she had sometimes tried to adapt herself to the people she lived among, he and she might have gone together hand in hand through these long years and not been separated in thought; for she sometimes seemed as far away as if she had gone to another world. But she was the soul of honor and she loved him — although she judged him — better than he, with all his faults, deserved; but if there had been more charity. — He dared not let his thoughts wander like this. He must be going mad; for Alice was the perfect woman, and he had loved her — how he had loved her! When? It seemed a long time ago. It was before this thing had happened to his head. Yes, he loved her; of course he loved her the best of all, for she was his wife and the one perfect woman.

To his great relief Dr. Baker went out of the room at last, leaving Delia in charge, who sat quietly at the foot of the bed in her nurse's gown. Presently he heard the trampling of feet in the hall below, followed by a scuffle, and he fancied it was the constable coming to take Gus Leggett to the county jail. A moment later he heard a

woman's scream, then an angry colloquy, and Delia stole out of the room. He knew she had gone to beg them to be quiet for his sake. As she opened the door he heard Madge Leggett say in fierce tones: "If it had been me, I'd have hit out thirty years ago. The doctor has hounded father ever since —" The door closed and the voice was lowered in deference to Delia.

So this was the way they looked at it! He had done his best to befriend Gus, and to persuade him to be something better than an idle good-for-nothing. He was considered Gus's enemy; they had not learned the truth that every man is his own worst enemy. His enemy! This was a great discovery! When he was well again, he meant to write a book full of this thought, and it should be bound in scarlet, and on the cover, printed in gilt letters that should stretch from top to bottom, to catch the popular eye, should be this simple title:—

HIS ENEMY.

But Madge was Gus's daughter and she defended her father as a lioness would defend its cub; disreputable as he was, his children loved him.

A great longing came upon Edmund to see his own daughter. He was glad his wife was not at home; the shock and the strain would have

been too hard for poor Alice, but if he could only have his daughter's loving hand in his, he felt that he could brave all the terrors of the future. His little Peggy! She had been a comfort ever since she was a tiny child, and toddled up to him to put her little hand in his. She was n't perfect, she had many of his faults, but she was so loving, and she always understood, and when a man is lying alone, facing an unknown future, it is uncritical, warm, human love that counts. If Margaret would only come!

By a great effort he managed to utter her name aloud. He spoke hardly above a whisper, but Delia was by his side in a moment.

"Do you want anything, Uncle Edmund?" she asked. She bent her head down close to him and listened, while he repeated the beloved name.

"You want Margaret. She will be here in a few minutes. Richard telephoned that they are coming."

Margaret was playing cribbage with her grandmother when Richard Howland was announced. She ran downstairs without any premonition of disaster and greeted him with a face lighted up with happiness. It was cruelly hard for him to have to tell her what had happened, and as he saw the color leave her face and a great change come over it, he felt as if he had killed at one blow all that made the joyousness of her youth.

"Uncle Gideon thought you had better stay

where you are until to-morrow," he said; "there is no immediate danger, and Delia is doing the nursing. Either Jack or I will spend the night with him."

"Of course I shall go to him at once. I should n't have an easy moment if I were n't on the spot. I shall not be in the way; you need not be afraid to take me. I must tell Aunt Marcia now, but I won't keep you five minutes."

As Margaret made her simple preparations, her aunt knew that it was idle to try to keep her. The girl who had impulsively come to Edgefield because her father and her grandmother missed her, was not likely to stay quietly here at the suggestion of others.

All that her aunt Marcia could do was to promise to come herself to the Edgefield House in the morning, and to see that her niece was protected from the storm. She put the family fur-lined circular over Margaret's shoulders. It seemed a garment of classic grace as the girl wore it, and the face above it had gained a new strength.

Afterwards, as Margaret sat in the sleigh by Richard, her composure gave way. She had never remembered her father as anything but absolutely well, and she was haunted by a presentiment that this dastardly assault would cause his death. She could keep up before her aunt Marcia, but now that she was with the

sympathetic Richard, who looked at her with such pity in his eyes, she let her tears fall without trying to check them. She thought what a different journey this was from the one on that summer day, when he had found her crying by the roadside and driven her home. She had thought then that her heart was broken, not realizing the vistas beyond vistas of greater sorrows that mean heartbreak.

After a time she said, "You told me Gus Leggett had been drinking. But how, even in that condition, could he want to do any harm to my father, who is so friendly and kind?" The thought of her father's unfailing goodness overcame her again.

Richard hesitated. "Your father always had a sort of righteous indignation against evil-doers," he said slowly.

"Yes, I know; he never liked Gus Leggett."

"I am afraid Gus had been harboring a grudge against him for some time. On the Fourth of July your father thought Gus was at the bottom of the disturbance, and I suppose it mortified him to be wrongly accused before others."

"But that was no reason for his trying to take father's life."

"I am sure he did n't try to take it; he hit out at him in a fit of blind fury."

They were coming to the place in the road where Richard had found Margaret so many years ago. They both remembered, but neither spoke of it.

The river that had run so freely then was now clogged with ice, and beyond them, at the end of the road, rose the round hill covered with feathery, green pines, that were sifted over with snow. The view was beautiful, even in its desolation.

It seemed strange to her to be driving over this road with him, for when she was a little girl, she had wished so hard that Richard Howland would come again some day and take her to drive. And now the wish had come true in this terrible way. How did one ever dare to ask for anything?

They drove along for a time in absolute silence. Then Richard asked, "Are you cold?" for the wind was rising and driving the snow into their faces.

"No," Margaret answered; but she felt as if her heart and soul were numbed, and could never feel the warmth of normal life again.

He had never had such an intense longing to comfort any one; but he felt that nothing he could say would lighten her burden of anxiety and grief.

"I wish your mother and Philip were here," he said after a time. "It's hard for you to have to go through this alone."

She felt that she had entered a strange, new country; a land that her most vivid imagination had never pictured; a valley full of shadows. If the whole world were trying to comfort

her, she would still have to meet her sorrow alone. Yet she was glad to have Richard with her; he had the strength that comes when one has known grief.

"Mother and Philip will learn the truth soon enough," she said.

The twilight was deepening as they approached the Edgefield House, and Margaret dimly saw a group of figures walking slowly towards them. In the front of the straggling procession were two men firmly holding a third, who was walking between them with bowed head. With a start Margaret recognized Gus Leggett; they must be taking him to the jail.

Richard glanced at her, hoping that she had not realized what the scene meant.

"He won't have to lose his life, will he?" she asked very low. "That would be terrible, if he did n't mean to do it."

"I think it will only be imprisonment." Richard's first wish on hearing of the deed had been that the dastardly scoundrel might be hanged; but now a feeling of compassion and charity came over him, as he saw that bent head. Why should he, Richard Howland, judge any man? He remembered the fierce impulses of anger which he had felt, and the words of his great predecessor came into his mind, "Here, but by the grace of God, goes Richard Baxter."

When they reached the Edgefield House and

Richard pushed open the front door, Margaret saw a group of rough-looking men with their chairs drawn up around the fire. They were talking eagerly and in low tones; but when they saw her, there was an instant hush. The pity that was on their faces brought the lump to her throat again, and the tears to her eyes.

"Come with me," said Richard. "I am afraid it is pretty cold in the parlor, but I'll have to leave you there while I go up to your father. Celestine, Madge," he called, "will you see that somebody makes a cup of tea for Miss Ware, and that there 's a fire for her to get warmed by?"

In a few moments Celestine came. Her eyes were red with weeping, and there was a pitiful droop to her mouth. "Let me take your wet things," she said.

Suddenly Margaret realized that this girl was suffering as she was, but to her sorrow was added the sting of disgrace.

"Don't mind about me," said Margaret, slipping off her snow-covered wraps. "I could n't touch any tea, if I had it."

Celestine put her handkerchief to her eyes, and began to sob with the abandonment of a child. With a quick impulse Margaret stole her arm around her. The two young creatures stood there clinging to each other. In this moment of desolation each remembered nothing except that here was a human being who needed sympathy.

Presently Margaret looked up and saw Madge. As she stood in the doorway in her flame-colored gown, she looked like an avenging fury from the Inferno.

"Don't you touch her, Tina Howland," she called out. "Have you forgotten how mean her father has always been to ours? Have n't you any more spirit than that? He has always thought we were nothing but dirt under his feet, and you go and cry on her shoulder."

Margaret sank into a chair, and looked at Madge with bewilderment. How could she say such things about the most upright and gentle of men? A wave of anger swept over her such as she had never supposed it possible that she could feel.

"I have not come here to say anything against your father," she stated in a low, but penetrating voice, "but I cannot hear you say such things about mine. All I ask is that you will leave me alone."

Madge, softened and quieted by her words, took the weeping Celestine by the arm, and drew her out of the room.

A little later Richard came back to Margaret. "Your father has been asking for you," he told her. "Do you think you can make a great effort and hide your feelings? If so, you can see him for a few minutes."

"Yes, you can trust me."

He looked at her and saw a change come over her face. She was once again her father's little Peggy, who had been nothing but a cheerful influence in his life.

As they stood in the doorway a spasm of pain crossed Margaret's face, as she saw the familiar figure, that had always been full of a life that was vivid in its intensity, lying motionless in the great white bed.

Delia quietly left the room, and Margaret was alone with her father. She leaned down and took one of his hands. The tender light of an overmastering affection that had in it the elements of mother love came into her eyes. It was now her turn to protect the one who had always shielded and guarded her.

"Father, it is Peggy."

A look of utter satisfaction came into his weary eyes. He no longer felt shut away in lonely isolation. There was no need of speech now, for Margaret always understood.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SUMMONS

By Monday morning Dr. Ware was able to talk and even to utter a few jests. Margaret would have been blissfully happy except for the fact that they had not been able to reach the automobilists at Salisbury, and although Richard and Delia, as well as her own common sense, told her that they had undoubtedly changed their plans on account of the storm, she began to fear there had been an accident. It was not natural to her to worry, but the shock of her father's condition had unstrung her nerves, and so as the day passed without any word from them, she saw in imagination Philip, with his mother and hers, lying senseless and with broken bones in some desolate inn. Six o'clock came, and Margaret was so white and silent that Richard once more telephoned to Boston. Philip was at the same moment trying to get the Edgefield House.

Presently Richard called out cheerily: "It's all right; they did n't get our telegrams until they reached Boston. Your mother and Philip are coming on the first train to-morrow."

"Not until to-morrow?"

"No. The last train has gone."

Margaret felt as if she could not wait until the next day to see her mother. Why had not Philip insisted on bringing her to Edgefield that night in his automobile?

"Philip wants to speak to you," said Richard.

"Well, dear Peggy, it's good to hear your voice," Philip said, after their first greetings were exchanged. "I'm glad we were spared the worst. Richard says your father is getting on famously."

"Did he say that? I am so glad."

"I'll see you in the morning, dear child."

"Why could n't we get you by telephone?" she asked.

"We changed our plans on account of the storm."

"Where were you?"

He hesitated before he replied, "At New Hartford. I met some fellows there and they persuaded us to stay over Sunday."

"Not being able to reach you, I was afraid there had been an accident, and I kept hoping all day that you would call me up; although you were so far off it was unreasonable to expect it, but you see you have spoiled me."

"I meant to call you up, but it was such a job to get long distance, and I was rushed every minute. We had a bully time, although of course I missed you. It would have been perfect if you

had been there; but never mind, little girl, I'll take you on the same trip when Uncle Edmund is out of the woods."

Margaret told herself that she was unreasonable to let his words jar on her. She could not expect him to divine by instinct what she had gone through. She knew that she was in an unusually sensitive condition on account of her loss of sleep. "Dear Philip," she thought remorsefully, "it will be good to see his cheerful face; it will be like a tonic."

Meanwhile Alice had summoned her nephew by telephone and entreated him to take her to Edgefield that night in his automobile.

He came around to expostulate with her. It was utterly unlike his calm and self-restrained aunt to want to rush off in that way like a crazy woman, and arrive at Edgefield in the middle of the night.

"They all say Uncle Edmund is getting on splendidly," he said. "I'll call Richard up again, though, so as to set your mind at ease."

Alice stood by with a tense face.

"He says not to come to-night, that you could n't see him until morning anyway. He says to take the first train in the morning."

"I should like to speak to Richard myself," Alice said imperiously.

Richard repeated what he had told Philip, but she would not listen to reason. She forced

her reluctant nephew to take her to Edgefield that night.

"Heaven defend me from these intense people," he said to himself. He saw now where Margaret had acquired her tendency to go off at half cock. He had supposed it was from her father, although, when he came to think of it, his uncle Edmund had never shown a disposition to sacrifice his comfort for any one. Dear little Peggy! How his heart grew warm at the thought of her! She had her mother's strength of character, bless her! and what was more to the purpose to a pleasure-loving dog like himself, her father's sense of humor and love of life. He was terribly sorry for Margaret, for he remembered how he had felt at the time of the death of his father, whose loss had been a lasting regret; but he was sure that this was only a passing shadow, and that her father would speedily recover.

As Philip and his aunt flashed through the night in his automobile, he wondered, as he glanced across at her, what was going on in the mind of that silent, veiled figure. Was she feeling some little compunction for all those needless months of separation, she, who was now so recklessly anxious to save a few meagre hours? He asked himself how he could stand the strain of such a separation from his Margaret when a week-end had been so distracting. It was lucky his uncle was a sober, middle-aged chap. He

remembered guiltily the pleasure he had taken when he and Eloise hunted for the graves of her ancestors, while she clung to his arm and he held the umbrella over her, as they were beaten upon by the wind and rain. Then there was that glorious afternoon of skating. Why could he not have let one of the other fellows look out for Eloise? After all, it was her fault and not his, for if Delia had been his companion, he would not have been tempted into any disloyalty to Margaret. If he had heard any other fellow who was engaged to his Peggy say the things to Eloise that he had said, he should have thought him an awful cad and longed to kick him downstairs. What would Margaret say if she knew? Would she realize that his strong love for her was in no way endangered by his flirtation with Eloise? Although he had said some of the same things to both of them, they had meant nothing in one case, and in the other he meant them with his whole heart and soul. There was a constant strain in living up to Margaret's idea of what he ought to be. When he was with Eloise, he knew, that in spite of her flattery, she had sounded her plummet to the depths of his selfishness. It was almost a relief not to have to pretend to be better than he was. He told himself that in reality he was neither so white as Margaret pictured him, nor so black as Eloise painted him; he was a very decent sort, and he meant to live gloriously,

enjoying to the full the gifts of the gods. It was hard lines that he should have to go to Edgefield in the height of the Boston season, when Lent was coming so early this year; and now that his uncle was on the mend it seemed unnecessary. It was just his luck! How Richard Howland, who might have stayed on in Boston, could banish himself to that God-forsaken spot, and actually consider it a good opening to be Dr. Baker's assistant, it passed Philip's comprehension to understand, but he thought it very fortunate that his friend was there at the present crisis.

Richard and Jack took turns in spending the night with Dr. Ware, while Delia did the nursing by day. Gideon's presence made his brother-in-law so nervous that he had yielded to necessity, and remarked blandly that he was so busy he thought it best to turn the case over to Richard, who was to consult him frequently.

Richard was sorry that Mrs. Ware and Philip were coming that night. He dreaded any excitement for his patient, and was determined that he should not hear of their arrival until the morning. He had hoped that Margaret would go to bed early and have a long night's sleep, and now she was eager to sit up and welcome the travelers.

Making the best of the situation, he built a cheerful fire on the hearth in the parlor, and drew the sofa over by the table, where Margaret could

have the light for her reading. He piled up the sofa cushions and told her to drop off to sleep if she could, for he would promise to wake her when her mother and Philip came. He spread a faded shawl over her that was pleasant to the touch and was covered with a pattern of palm leaves in dull colors.

“What a fascinating old shawl!” she said.

She wondered how the Leggetts chanced to have anything so quaintly old-fashioned. She leaned back luxuriously among the sofa cushions and felt a sense of physical well-being and mental peace that she would not have thought possible two nights before. Her father was getting better, and her mother and Philip were coming.

Richard pulled the shades down, and then handed her a novel that he said Delia had asked him to give her.

“How good you are. You always know how to make people comfortable.” She smiled up at him gratefully.

“That is my business.”

“It may be your business, now, but it was just your nature when you were a boy. It makes me think of the time you picked me up on the road when I was eight, and drove me home; being taken care of like this makes me feel as if I were a little girl again.”

He went across to the fireplace and changed the position of a log.

“Good-night,” he said abruptly; “I must go up to your father and give Delia a rest.”

She wondered what she had said or failed to say to make him so short with her.

“You are as bad as father,” she told him. “Does n’t any doctor ever let a patient thank him? May n’t I at least say how grateful I am for all you are doing for father? May n’t I tell you what a comfort it is to have you here? Is n’t he really out of danger now?” she added after a pause.

Richard hesitated for a second. “He is wonderfully better.”

It was after midnight when Alice and Philip reached their destination, but the lights were still burning in the Edgefield House with what she felt to be a heartless glow. It had been a strange, unreal journey as they went swiftly through the barren country with its desolate brown fields and leafless trees, and then entered the cold, still world of the north with its vast expanse of snow, that seemed to Alice like a shroud. She was haunted by the thought that she might arrive too late, and that there would never again be any warmth or cheer for her.

Margaret was standing in the doorway when they arrived, and Richard came forward a moment later and gave Mrs. Ware the latest bulletin in regard to her husband.

“I can’t let you see Dr. Ware just now, — for

he is sleeping," he told her; "there has been a wonderful improvement in the last twenty-four hours."

"Thank God!" she murmured.

All Richard's sense of the unreasonableness of her conduct in insisting upon this night journey left him as he looked at her haggard face. He had an awed sense that he was standing in the half-revealed presence of tragedy. There had been some inner experience here which he could only dimly fathom; but whatever mistakes she might have made, she was expiating them now. He felt that if one could be loved like this, one would count life to have been worth living, whether it were long or short.

"Can I go up and look at him, if I do not go into the room?" Mrs. Ware asked in a low voice.

She looked up at Richard as she spoke, as if she were a docile child, and he a grown man wiser than herself.

He was touched by the change in their relations; it seemed so short a time since he had adored his "beautiful lady," who had been his ideal of all that was best in life. Alice, on her side, with her nice perception of character, had recognized the strength of the man who stood before her. He was no longer the awkward farmer's boy, he was the doctor, to whose skill and clear judgment had been confided what was most precious in life.

As she stood silently in the doorway looking at her husband's sleeping figure, the changed expression of his wan face moved her so that she felt a sudden giddiness and caught at the open door for support. Richard gently put her arm through his and led her into the next room.

"I'll send Margaret up to you," he said. "I thought you would like to sleep here where you can be called if he asks for you."

"Tell me the truth," she demanded with her eyes fixed on him sombrely. "Philip seemed to have the impression that you thought he was out of danger. Is it only because I have not seen him since he was in perfect health, that to me he has the look of a man who is doomed?"

"There has been a marked improvement since Saturday night. He is clear in the daytime and he has been sleeping peacefully to-night."

"You are keeping something back from me," Alice said quietly. "I can see that there is something amiss — something that perhaps you doctors do not understand."

"There is always the fear of internal injuries in a case like this," he said slowly, "but so far he has been doing better than we expected, and if there is the slightest change for the worse, Uncle Gideon is going to send to Boston for a specialist."

Meanwhile as Philip folded Margaret in his arms, he knew that here was his haven of rest.

Her loss of color and the dark circles under her eyes made him painfully conscious of what she had gone through.

“My poor darling! How you must have suffered!” he cried with a little shudder; “and to think that I never knew until to-night!”

“I don’t mind anything now that father is getting well. It is so good to have you here — dearest.” She brought out the word shyly.

How she loved him! And how she trusted him! He felt a burning sense of shame when he thought of the last few days.

“Sweetheart, I feel as if I never wanted to leave you again,” he told her. “I’d just like to cut Tech and everything else in life and stay here with you until your father gets well.”

“You can’t do that,” she said gently. “You have your own work to do, and no one is allowed in the sick-room for more than a few minutes at a time, except the doctors and nurses; but it will be a joy if you can stay for a day or two.”

“I can stay till mother gets here, at any rate, and I can come up every Sunday. I’m going to take you off for a long ride to-morrow. It’s lucky that I came, for nobody seems to be looking after you, little girl.”

CHAPTER XXVII

OUTSIDE THE DOOR

By the time Nancy came, a few days later, the little company had settled down into a daily routine. Alice shared the nursing with Delia, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Richard succeeded in making her take either rest or exercise.

“My place is by my husband,” she declared.

Edmund smiled a little sadly. All his old eagerness was gone. He did not have the energy to love or hate as of old. Angels and devils alike assumed a neutral-tinted shade, and if he could not rejoice as he used to do at his wife’s presence, neither could he find the strength to hate Gus Leggett. Edmund chafed under the monotony of life in a sick-room, and even Margaret’s bright face failed to give him its old comfort.

When Delia was on duty, Alice came down to see her step-sister.

“It was good of you to come,” she said.

The two women looked at each other in silence. Nancy thought how changed Alice was. It was sad to see her with this tragic face; she hoped

she had the strength to throw off that look of despair when she was in the sick-room, for it must be very depressing to Edmund. Alice was sure Nancy could not understand the gravity of the situation, for she seemed almost cheerful.

“Can I see Edmund for a few minutes now?” she asked.

Alice grew perceptibly stiffer. “He is allowed to see no one but Delia and me; even Margaret only sees him for a few minutes at a time.”

“Margaret wrote that he said he should like to see me.”

“I am sure that it would not be good for him to see a new face. They did not let me go into his room when I first came. He has to be kept absolutely quiet and free from all excitement.”

“But, Alice, dear, would there be any excitement in his seeing me? Of course with you it was different, because he cared so much. I have come to stay as long as you want me. I can slip in and out of the sick-room, and hardly be noticed. I thought I could help you in the care of him.”

“You’re very kind, and perhaps a little later Delia and I may be very glad of your help.”

The tears came into Nancy’s eyes. “Alice, you will let me see him for a few minutes?” she begged. “I’ll wait until the doctor comes and ask him if it will do any harm. Of course I don’t want to tire him or excite him, but remember,

Alice, I've known him all my life, and we were like brother and sister."

Just then Richard Howland came into the hotel, and Nancy ran forward to speak to him.

"Why, Mrs. Bates!" he exclaimed, with his face aglow with pleasure at the sight of her. "Dr. Ware has been asking for you several times to-day. He's not used to being an invalid, and he's got bored with the rest of us. You can go up as soon as I come down, but you'd better not stay more than ten minutes."

"You are sure it won't tire him? I shall be here long enough to see him some other time, if it is better."

"No, it will brighten him up immensely to see you."

Nancy's radiant face suggested that he had granted a priceless boon, but Alice looked as if she were plunged into still greater depths of woe. She went upstairs with the doctor, and prepared Edmund for Nancy's coming.

"Oh, is she here?" he cried. "I want to see her, I want to see her right straight off."

His eagerness gave Alice a torturing stab of jealousy. She had been devoted to Edmund through these weary days and nights of his illness, hardly pausing for sleep and food, yet with all her efforts she had failed to keep him from being intensely depressed, and at the mere mention of the name of his cousin, he had regained

something of his old cheerfulness. She knew she ought to feel nothing but profound gratitude that there was any influence that could so change him. She was appalled at the clamor of the unworthy feelings that she found in herself. Was it possible that she, who had tried to go through life with quiet dignity and reserve, should have this fierce and almost ungovernable feeling of jealousy towards her gentle step-sister, whose aim, like her own, was Edmund's best good? She ought to thank her with a full heart for coming at this crisis, and yet she longed to thrust her out of the house and send her home. Instead of that, she took her up to Edmund's sick-room, where he was lying propped up in bed, his wan face looking very thin and pale against the white pillows.

As Alice went out of the room she heard him say, "Oh, Nancy, it's so good to see one of my own people!"

One of his own people! So she, who had shared his life so closely for all these years, was temporarily put on one side, and his weary mind had gone back to those days of long ago, when his mother and Nancy filled his life. His mother was too frail to come to see him, but he talked of her constantly. His sisters came faithfully to inquire for him and to ask if they could be of use, but after seeing each of them for five minutes, he had been so tired that he had not cared to

repeat the experiment; and even Margaret, after the first novelty of her presence had worn off, failed to bring him the old comfort; but Nancy, whom he had played with as a child, was one of his own people!

Alice paced softly back and forth in the corridor outside Edmund's room. What were they saying, those two, whose interests, springing from a common source, went so far back of her own knowledge of either of them? She took out her watch; she supposed Nancy would take no heed of how the time was passing. She had only been there three minutes! What a strange thing time was! These three minutes seemed the equivalent of days of happy life! Once when she went by the door, she heard the peal of merry laughter. How could Nancy laugh at such a moment as this? But she could not have been told of the serious dangers that menaced Edmund's life. And he was laughing too, while she was pacing restlessly up and down outside the closed door, never getting away from the awful shadow of what the next few days might bring. He was laughing with one of his own people! Five minutes had gone now. How the time crept!

What a tragedy life was for those who thought and felt! It was almost thirty years since she and Edmund had promised to take each other "for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, so long as they both

should live." They had started out with such a rapturous certainty that their marriage was to be unlike that of the average man and woman. They had looked with ill-concealed pity at Nancy and her husband, and at Sophia and Dr. Baker, feeling that they, in their commonplace unions, had missed the divine spark that is the preservative of life. Now, as she looked back, it seemed as if almost from the beginning she and Edmund had missed the road. It was one of the cruel things about her temperament, she told herself, that when she once turned the light of her pitiless judgment on her own failings, she could see them as clearly as she could those of other people. She knew now that he and she had begun by shutting themselves out from the larger world of which they were a part. If she had only urged him to overcome his faults of temperament, instead of encouraging him in them, this terrible tragedy might have been averted. For a moment she saw the larger vision of a world as it might be, if men and women, instead of keeping their eyes fixed on the narrow measure of their own interests, were to be drawn together by mutual dependence.

She prayed God from the depths of her agonized heart to restore her husband to strength. It seemed another existence when she had been bending all her energies to try to make him come and live with her in Boston, for now she so longed

to keep him at any cost. Yes, even if he were to have the life of an invalid, and even if she had to stay for years in this dreary Edgefield House, she would go through it all with a kind of exaltation, if she could only keep him.

Alice heard the sound of voices again, then there was silence in the room, a silence that seemed to last through some long minutes, as she paced up and down the corridor. Nancy's time was up, and as Alice was debating whether to go and summon her step-sister, the door softly opened and Nancy came out. The light of some great experience was on her face, but her smile went to Alice's heart even more than the tears which had sprung to her eyes. She put one arm impulsively around her step-sister; she could not speak, but even now Alice did not lose her self-control.

"He has told you?" she whispered.

"Yes."

After a time Nancy said: "There is a chance for his life; surgeons do such wonderful things now. If the operation is successful, he may be as well as ever again. Alice, we must feel that everything is coming out right, so that we can give him some of our courage."

"How can I give what I have n't got myself? It is easy to have courage when one stands on the outside, but for me" — She left the sentence unfinished. "I am glad the doctors have decided

to take him home first," she went on after a pause; "he is so eager to get back."

Margaret came out of another room. The anxiety and sorrow that were written all over her young face made her an unfamiliar person, but she brightened at the sight of her aunt, and flung her arms about her neck, feeling that salvation had come.

"You dear, dear thing," she cried. "You have come to stay, have n't you?"

"As long as I am needed, and I'll write to Philip to-day; I know he will be only too glad to come on, and be here Friday."

"Oh, no!" both Margaret and her mother exclaimed, "don't do that!"

Alice had found Philip a most disturbing factor during the few days he spent with them. She had him constantly on her mind, and in his efforts to comfort Margaret, he had taken her away at the very times when she wanted her most. Margaret, on her side, felt that the strain and anxiety attending her father's operation would be cruelly hard for Philip, if he were on the spot.

"Philip will want to come," Nancy assured her, "and it is only fair to tell him the state of the case. I know it would be a comfort to you, Margaret, to have him here."

"When father is getting better, it would be," she said softly, "but now I don't want any one

coming in between me and father, not even Philip."

It was a pleasure to get back into their own house, and as Dr. Ware looked out into the branches of the pine in front of his window, he had a feeling of peace which he had not known for weeks. He was at home, and he had with him those he loved best. For the first time since his accident he felt that life, even in a less vigorous form, might be worth the long struggle which would be his portion, if the operation were successful. He wondered why, in facing the possibility of death, he had the harassing feeling that if he were to go now, he should be torn away before he had done more than skirt along the edge of life, for he had been given more than fifty years filled with love and work; but he had failed to realize his dream that love would be so strong an influence that it would help him to accomplish glorious things. He felt now that he had slipped through life with a desire to get the flower of all human experiences, but, in shrinking from pain, he had somehow missed its fruit. He had called the sedative which had stood him in good stead in many crises, philosophy. But now he felt that if he could go over the years again, he would face squarely all the darker problems of life.

Yet, how one suffered when not helped over the hard places by the opiate, philosophy! Alice

had none of it. If he were to go, she would drink her bitter experience to the dregs. He longed to find words in which to comfort her, but they could neither of them talk of the future. As for his mother and his daughter, the one was too old, and the other too young, to find the loss of him more than a passing anguish: and Nancy, his old-time comrade, who was the only one of them who loved him with no knowledge of his faults, had inherited, as he had, that power of going through all experiences and still keeping her sense of the joy in the world. But Nancy had never shirked things. She had truly lived; she had learned better than any woman he had ever known, the deep meaning of joy and sorrow. His Margaret had something of the same temperament. He only hoped life might be kinder to her than it had been to his cousin. He wished he were going to give her into the keeping of some one as strong and reliable as Richard Howland; then he should have no misgivings concerning her future. In Philip he saw his own temperament somewhat changed through difference in circumstances and modifications in character. The boy, with greater charm of person and a more volatile disposition, had the power to indulge all his tastes, and he, too, had that hostility to sorrow and pain which meant the allaying of misery at any cost.

The first that Philip knew of the operation

was a telegram from his mother stating that it was over successfully, but that there were grave fears that his uncle's strength would not hold out. With his usual unwillingness to face the worst, he felt sure that his mother was needlessly alarmed. He could not easily catch the next train to Edgefield, but he determined to take the one in the afternoon. Poor little Margaret! This had been a terrible experience for her. She ought to have let him know, so that he could have been there to help her through it, but he was very glad that he had been spared the anxiety, for he felt things so much more acutely than most people. Richard Howland, for instance, met every crisis in life with a certain stolid composure.

Philip had sent a telegram saying he was coming, so he had hoped that Margaret, who would not be allowed in the sick-room, might meet him at the station; but there were no familiar faces when the train arrived. He gave his dress-suit case to an expressman, and then went through the station, noticing for the first time a certain solemnity that the hackman and a waiting group had in common. They looked at him with respectful pity. He began to feel uneasy. Could it be that things had not gone well with his uncle? But surely, if he were very low, that splendid vitality of his would pull him through. As he made his way across the common he recognized some acquaintances, but it seemed as if

every one scattered at his approach. When he reached the gate of his uncle's house he thought surely Margaret would run out to meet him. There was no sign of life about the place, and the shades were drawn. As he went up the steps he looked across the broad piazza to the front door, and with a sense of the intolerableness and unreasonableness of life, he saw hanging there the symbol of death. Even yet he refused to believe the truth, for there was no crape, only a wreath of green. Then the door opened and his mother came out to meet him.

"It 's all over," she said softly. "Margaret is waiting for you in the other room. She seems completely prostrated, poor child, but I know you will be the greatest comfort to her."

Philip went on into the house, and it was with a feeling of rage against fate that he folded Margaret in his arms. He hardly knew this pale, silent Margaret, with heavy eyes and tear-stained face. Why must life be so cruel? And why to him, of all people, had this blow come? He must get Margaret away as quickly as possible from this atmosphere of grief, these long faces, and this silent house with its tragic associations. Poor child! How she had suffered! For the first time in his life, he felt himself unequal to an emergency. His self-confidence had never failed before to show him the right course to take; but now, words failed him, and he could only press Marga-

ret's hand, and kiss her in silence. He felt as if he had been suddenly taken from a pinnacle of light and air and hope, and thrust into a dungeon.

In the sad days before the funeral Philip showed a tenderness for Margaret and a resourceful, practical ability that no one, save his mother, had expected to find in him. When all was over and he went back to his interrupted studies, it was with the promise that he would come again for the following Sunday.

While he was there Margaret had tried to put at arm's length her grief for her father, that Philip, who was so sensitive to sorrow, might not have his kind heart still further distressed; but after he had gone, her desolation came over her with renewed force. She could not sleep, and looking across the garden from her wing of the house to her mother's room, she saw that her light was still burning. She went along the entry and softly tried her mother's door. It was locked. She called her in a low voice, and turned the knob back and forth, so as to attract her attention. It was evident that her mother was in too great anguish to wish to be comforted, and with an awed feeling of the remoteness from herself which this meant, she turned to go back to her own room. As she was passing her aunt's door, she saw that it was ajar. Nancy heard her footsteps, and came out and caught her in her arms.

"Come in here, darling," she said. "Get into

my bed and we will have a little talk. There is no use in trying to go to sleep."

Nancy was sitting by the window. She had pulled up the curtain and the moon was shining in. Margaret, as she lay in bed, could see it and the innumerable company of stars.

"Oh, Aunt Nancy, where is he?" she cried, as her eyes traveled from one to another of these distant constellations. "I feel as if it were so lonely for him. He always needed me so much."

Nancy came over and put her arm around Margaret. "Dearest, there are others who need you; and he had had a rich and happy life. I never knew any one who had so much joy and so little sorrow. To die, just at the zenith of one's powers, before the limitations of middle life begin; to live gloriously and to die triumphantly, what more can we wish for our friends? Darling, as I was sitting here and thinking of his freed soul, glad and free for evermore, the wonder of having known him came over me, and it seemed to sweep away something of the pain of losing him. Your life and mine will be richer always."

Margaret's tears were falling fast. She could not think of her father's life as a glorious one; she could only remember the disappointments of his later years.

"And to think that I was away from him all that time at school," she moaned.

"Remember the comfort you were to him."

Margaret could think of nothing but her own sorrow. She felt that she would give up all her friends, yes, even Philip, if only she could have her father.

"I know I am unreasonable," she sobbed, "when every one is so good to me, but — I don't care about anything any more. I am perfectly miserable. I have to keep up before mother, but you don't mind what I say, do you, dear Aunt Nancy?"

"No, darling, you can say anything to me that you like."

As Nancy held the girl's hand tight in hers, she remembered how she had sobbed her heart out after her step-father's death, while Alice had gone about with a stony, tragic face. Nancy had lived through so much since then that she had learned that a sorrow which finds relief in speech is not so lasting as a grief that numbs the heart and shuts one away from human sympathy.

"Dearest," she said once more, "every one loves you, and every one wants to help you. There is no use in my telling you that you are young, and that the world will still hold much happiness for you, because just now I know that would be a cruel thing to say; but, after a time, the sharpest of the pain will go and you will find a great peace. Think what you are to your mother, and think how you are all the world to Philip. You must say to yourself, 'I am glad to live, and I will try to find comfort in life for Philip's sake.'"

CHAPTER XXVIII

A HOUSE OF CARDS

MARGARET'S trouble brought out all that was most tender in Philip, although he could not wholly understand a nature so different from his own. This subdued, sad Margaret with an air of depression and languor did not seem like his Margaret, whose joyousness had been her greatest charm.

He felt that life at present was like one of the card houses he and Margaret used to build when they were children for the especial purpose of knocking them down, and seeing one card fall upon the other; now it was fate who gave the push, and frail human beings went down with a crash that involved others in their collapse. Gus Leggett, with a greater irresponsibleness than fate itself, had given the first knock-down blow, and Dr. Ware in his fall had dragged down his wife; she, holding out her hand for some support, had clutched at Margaret, who was now almost inseparable from her mother, and had caught something of her gloom. Margaret, in her turn, was leaning heavily on him, but, thank heaven,

he was no division of a card house, but a very solid and cheerful person who found life a joyous thing still, even if an agreeable, but somewhat shallow, and self-indulgent elderly gentleman was freed from all earthly pain.

As time went on, Philip found it hard to conceal the fact that he was being frightfully bored, when he had to listen to Margaret as she talked about her father by the hour every Saturday and Sunday. It was not like his little girl to forget the rights of others, and one bright afternoon in early May, he decided that the time had arrived to press his own claims.

He had come to Edgefield to spend Sunday, and proposed taking Margaret for a drive. She was reading aloud to her mother, and she closed the book with a listless air, as if she were exchanging one joyless task for another.

He was worried, for she seemed in such an unnatural state that he feared she was going to have a nervous breakdown, such as the doctors were dreading for her mother. It was certainly his duty to snatch her away in time. If he only had her on the other side of the ocean, he was sure her cheerfulness would return. It was more than three months since her father's death, and it was time that she began to recover her old spirits.

The air and the sunshine brought the color to Margaret's pale face.

"There, you are beginning to look a little like your old self, sweetheart," he said as they drove along the country road. "Little girl, I've tried to be patient and unselfish —"

"You have succeeded," she said gratefully, "you have been so good to me."

"But a man who is made of flesh and blood can't sit around and talk about the past forever. Before this happened you remember what I wanted, and you promised you would marry me in June. Well, June is coming next month."

She sat up very straight and clasped her hands tightly together. They had reached a lonely stretch of road up a hill, and Philip slackened the reins and let the horse walk.

"The conditions have changed," she said very softly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that mother needs me, so that I must stay with her this summer."

Philip tried to conceal his irritation. "Now that is where you are wrong. You are morbid. You must not sacrifice your life to that of an older person who has had her time of joy. Dearest, I have n't said a word about this for all these months, although I was just bursting with it, because I respected your grief, but you can't keep on mourning always. It is n't fair to me. Sweetheart, I want you to marry me very quietly, without any fuss and feathers, as

soon as I get through at the Tech. We'll sail for Europe and drift around wherever you like, until we go to Paris in the autumn."

He looked at Margaret, but her eyes did not meet his.

"Well?" he asked.

"I feel I ought to stay with mother this summer," she repeated.

She was very gentle, and he knew that if her resistance could be met by physical force, he could crush her will in a moment, but it was a question of moral strength, and he felt baffled.

"You have promised to marry me," he said. "If you were already my wife, you would go with me to Europe as a matter of course. Well, the principle at stake is the same. You have told me you love me, but you don't love me as well as you loved your father; you don't love me as well as you love your mother, or instead of talking of your duty to her, you would remember your duty to me. It is unnatural. It is because your nerves are unstrung; but I am going to take you out of this gloomy hole. Can't you see, little girl, that it is your duty to be happy? You know that I adore the ground you walk on. If you won't be happy for your own sake, try to be happy for mine."

Margaret was asking herself if it were true that the duty she owed Philip was already superior to all other claims. Could it be right to leave her

mother now, who clung to her with such touching dependence, and to whom she was the only bright spot in a darkened world? Was it asking too much of Philip to put off their marriage for a few months? She felt that by the autumn her mother would be in a more normal condition.

"Philip," she began, "I know how hard all this is for you, and you have been very patient and dear, but I am sure it is right for me to stay with mother until the autumn. I don't want to keep you near us all summer, that would be asking too much; you must feel free to come and go as you like."

"Child, you have n't the faintest conception of what the alphabet of love means, or you could not be such a piece of ice."

"I thought love meant caring for another person so much that one would be willing to sacrifice one's own happiness, and I am only asking you to postpone yours."

"Oh, Peggy, Peggy," he cried despairingly, "you are nothing but a child. Can't you put yourself for one moment in the place of a man who is young and strong and just crazy about you?"

The horse had crept up the hill, and they were now going through a level stretch of woods. In a narrow part of the road they met another buggy.

"Why, it's Richard Howland," Philip said. "Hullo, Richard."

Margaret had recognized him long before Philip had, and the tumult of feeling that this unexpected encounter called up in her sent the blood coursing swiftly through her veins. During those sad days of her father's illness, Richard's daily visit had brought Margaret a sense of comfort and strength, but it was not until all was over and there was no further need of him that she realized what a void his ceasing to come made in her life. She did not acknowledge to herself the strength of her feeling for Richard, but resolutely thrust the thought of him aside and dwelt on Philip's gentleness and consideration and on his love for her and dependence on her. Now, as Richard pulled up his horse and stopped to speak to them she had a sudden access of shyness and a longing to escape mixed with irrepressible joy.

"How is your mother?" Richard asked as Philip turned sharply to the right to let him pass.

"She's a little better, thank you; she is n't quite so depressed, and she is beginning to sleep more."

"Margaret is the one I am worrying about," Philip burst out. "I am trying to persuade her that it is her duty to leave her mother and amuse herself with me. Now, as a doctor, don't you think that is a good scheme? Don't you think she needs a change?"

Richard looked along the road as if he were trying to find a means of escape. He had a strong

impulse to drive on, leaving the question unanswered, but it had never been his habit to shirk any situation, however painful.

"She looks as if she needed a change," he admitted. "I should say it was her duty to try to be happy."

"There," Philip cried exultantly, "I have medical authority for it now. I told you that you were morbid, little girl. We 'll go and see your uncle Gideon, and if he does n't prescribe a change, I'm much mistaken in him."

"If all the doctors in the world were to tell me I needed a change, it would make no difference. I am going to stay with mother this summer. I shan't break down; you need n't be afraid of that."

Now that Margaret no longer had a divided heart, but had made up her mind that it was right to stay with her mother for the present, she could find a certain comfort in going through her daily tasks. Time was already beginning to soften her first acute anguish, and peace was taking the place of grief. She even caught herself once or twice singing as she went about the house, but stopped quickly, hoping her mother had not heard her.

When Philip came again, two weeks later, she met him with one of her radiant smiles. But, in spite of her changed mood, there was none

of his old pleasure in the meeting, and she felt vaguely uneasy.

"What is the matter, dear?" she asked. "You don't look well."

"I'm all right. I never was better in my life; and you are looking wonderfully improved. The fact that our wedding is postponed does n't seem to weigh on your spirits."

"Philip!"

"Well, what else can have caused this surprising change?"

"That is cruel of you! It is ungenerous!"

"You can't deny that you don't love me as a woman ought to love the man she has promised to marry, and I am not the only one who sees it."

"Do you mean that you talk over our most private, most sacred affairs with other people? No, you need n't kiss me," and she withdrew from his embrace. "You may as well tell me all she said about me," Margaret observed. "I know who it is. There is only one person who could be so unfriendly."

"You have never done her justice," he muttered.

"I know I have n't," she owned remorsefully; "but she always seems to be getting in my way, and she never has a generous opinion of any one."

"Perhaps she sees the clearer for that."

Margaret winced. "What did she say?" she demanded.

“Oh, Margaret,” he cried. “If I was a brute and lost my self-control, it is because I am just desperate.”

“Why?”

“Because — well, of course you never have cared for me as I have cared for you, but I thought it was because you had a cooler temperament. I suppose it was wrong of me to go to see Eloise, but I had to talk to some one, I was so miserable, and she put into words all I felt. She said if a woman truly loved a man, she did n't play fast and loose with him. She said if you really cared, you would take my hand and go wherever I asked you. Tell me, Margaret, if it is true.”

Philip crossed the room and took his accustomed place on the sofa by Margaret's side. He eagerly watched her changing face.

“You don't answer me. If it is true,” he asked sternly, “why did you say you would marry me?”

Put thus before the bar of her accusing conscience Margaret felt brought to bay.

“I was so fond of you, and you were so eager about it, and I loved to be loved,” she faltered.

“Is this all? Are you quite sure there was no one else?”

“There was no one else who loved me that I could care about.”

There was silence between them again.

“That is not all Eloise said,” Philip continued unsteadily. “We dragged a lot of things out of

each other, and she told me how Richard had always cared about you."

"Richard!" Margaret suddenly became vividly alive. "You can't trust Eloise; her imagination runs away with her. Richard has never said one word of love to me, not one word. Richard is wrapped up in his profession. We are good friends, he is one of my best friends—"

"I guess there's no doubt that he cares for you; Eloise would n't be mistaken about a thing like that. She said she used to watch his face when people talked about you, and she told me that you seemed to care a lot for him at one time, and she guessed if he had n't been poor and down on his luck, and if he had belonged to a good family, and Lawrence had n't made that wretched marriage, something might have come of it."

Margaret's cheeks were flaming. She stood up and trembled with anger.

"How could you listen to Eloise? Why did n't you stop her?"

"Then there was no truth in it?" he inquired eagerly.

She sank down and covered her face with her hands. She saw with appalling clearness what the coming and going of Richard had meant to her, and she knew now, that the germ of this feeling that had grown so insidiously, had been with her all her life. It frightened her to find that the mere possibility that Richard loved her

made such a change in her feeling towards Philip.

The tears came into her eyes and she looked at Philip in piteous appeal. He was ruthlessly dragging to the light the secrets of her heart that she had never dared to face.

"Tell me it is all a hideous dream," he begged. "Forgive me for my disloyalty. I ought not to have listened to Eloise; I ought to have known you better, sweetheart, than to think for a moment you would promise to marry me, while you half cared for some one else. You have a lot to forgive in me; I have n't always been constant, but it has only been when I have n't had you. We 'll start all over again and I will never doubt you any more."

"We can't do it, Philip," she said brokenly, "and I am so sorry." The tears came into her eyes.

"Why not?" he asked huskily.

"Because, because—you've proved to me that I don't love you — enough."

"You do, you do," he cried. "You are worn out with all you have been through. When I once get you on the other side of the water, you 'll revive like a flower."

Philip refused to accept Margaret's decision as final, and the firmer she was, the more he protested that although she might consider herself

free, he should feel himself bound. He made two fruitless trips to Edgefield, and a third after the Institute of Technology closed, but his renewed appeal could not move her.

He saw that there was no use in hanging around Edgefield any longer, as their meetings were now a source of distress to both of them. He was profoundly unhappy and there seemed nothing worth living for. He would get through these wretched months somehow, and in the autumn he would go to Margaret once more, when, if love and constancy were of any avail, he would have his reward.

As he was walking along the village street with a heavy heart he looked up and saw Eloise and Delia coming out of a shop. He remembered that the Bakers were soon to go abroad.

"Why, Philip! I did n't know you were here," said Delia, joyfully. "Won't you come home with me to see father and mother?"

"I meant to take the next train," he said, pausing irresolutely.

His cousin Delia had always been his very good comrade, and his spirits lightened as he thought of the possibility of confiding his sorrows to her.

"If you have to take the next train, I can drive you to the station," said Eloise, as he helped her into the wagon, while the obsequious clerk put in her packages.

Philip looked from one girl to the other. He told himself that Delia was a "good sort" and Eloise a person to be avoided, yet he climbed into the wagon.

"Delia is going to stay in Edgefield all summer, to be near Margaret and her mother," Eloise told him, "and so I am going abroad with Uncle Gideon and Aunt Sophia."

"You are going abroad?" Philip felt as if another section of the card house had gone down.

"Yes, my uncle and aunt need some younger person to look out for them. People's consciences are such curious things," she mused. "Margaret felt it her duty to stay with her mother, and Delia thinks it's hers to look after Margaret. Now, you might suppose I should feel it mine to stay with my father and Richard, but they are sufficient to each other, and Mrs. Hart looks out for them very well. So it leaves me free to take up the duty Delia's conscience makes her drop. I suppose I am very cynical," she added, "but I believe we each of us do the thing we want to do most, and I am very glad of a chance to go to Europe. Delia will come over in the autumn, and we'll all settle down in Paris, where I am going to study art."

"You are going to Paris?"

"Yes; you don't seem to like the idea very much. Paris is a large place and you can give me a wide berth."

"You know I can never do that, if you are in the same town with me."

"Can't you? I'm sure it is n't my fault. I don't think I have ever in my life asked you to come to see me."

"You don't have to ask," he said under his breath; "you've got such an infernal magnetism about you that you make every one do whatever you want."

"I wish I did, there are so many things I want."

"What are they?"

"Do you suppose I am going to tell you? Do you know I could n't help wishing that you were going abroad this summer when I heard your wedding was put off? Our friendship has meant so much to me. Of course you will always be my friend after you are married, and I shall hope to see a very great deal of you and Peggy, but it will be different then."

"Different! I should hope so!" He gave a bitter little laugh. "I'll never come near you after I'm married."

Eloise turned her eyes on him reproachfully.

"Why not? Is that your idea of friendship?"

"You know very well why not."

Philip had honestly meant to take the next train to Boston, but they just missed it, and he found himself driving along with Eloise to the farm. Her father was so cordial that Philip felt

it would be rude to decline his pressing invitation to stay to supper.

"It has been my dream to study art in Paris all my life," Eloise confided to Philip, as they were sitting together in the pleasant living-room afterwards. "I had an opportunity to go there last winter with another girl, but I did n't feel that was the right way. But now, this is a perfect arrangement."

"Yes, I know you are always keen on being chaperoned."

"I have to be on account of my red hair," she observed plaintively; "you 've no idea what a handicap that is to me. If I looked like Delia, I should not have to consider such things any more than she does."

"I am very glad you don't look like Delia."

"I don't see what possible difference it can make to you how I look."

"It ought n't to, but it does, confound it."

"It's lucky for Peggy that she is so good looking, since you care so much for such things," she said sweetly.

"I have not come here to discuss Margaret with you," he returned in a tone that made Eloise change the subject.

His precious Margaret! Why had he not gone back to her when he missed the train? If only she had loved him as he loved her, he could have been constant to her forever. She was as dear when she

was absent as when she was present. He seldom thought of Eloise when she was out of his sight, but when he was with her, she compelled all of his attention, and to-night the smouldering flame of his feeling for her leapt into fire. When he loved Margaret with all that was best in him, why did this other woman have the power to sway him so? Was love a malady that attacked the heart, and could one be in love, not with one woman only, but with Woman, that ever mysterious, ever fascinating enigma, that took first one incarnation and then another?

The moon was coming up when Philip at last rose to go, and Eloise went out with him into the summer twilight. The air was fragrant with roses. She stopped to gather one for him. Fifty was not the age that claimed her greatest interest to-night.

"I suppose it will be good-by for always, as you say you don't want to see me after you are married," she said very low. "I am going to give you a red rose as a symbol of my gratitude for all the happy hours you have given me."

As she fastened the rosebud into his coat, her face was close to his, and he stooped and kissed her.

"That was unfair of you," she said reproachfully, "for I trusted you."

"You did n't; you knew I would do it."

A moment later, Richard, who was driving

home, saw the two figures outlined against the faintly glowing sky. He could cheerfully have horsewhipped Philip. How could a man who was engaged to such a priceless treasure as Margaret have a thought for any other woman? He merely bade them a grave good-evening, and drove on.

Ten minutes later Eloise slipped into the house with a white rose in her hand.

Richard bent his eyes aggressively on his book. If he spoke, he knew that he would say things which he would regret.

“Richard.”

He did not look up.

She came over to where he sat. “Richard, now don’t be surly and disagreeable; I have picked this rose on purpose for you.” She touched the spray caressingly.

He looked at her as she stood there in her white gown, holding the rose in her hand, and at the sight of her slender grace and of the halo of her wonderful hair, his indignation against Philip considerably abated. How could his inconstant nature be proof against this fascinating creature? Although Richard had no illusions concerning his sister, he felt protecting pity for her. Life was not going very smoothly for either of them just now.

She noted his softened expression and stooped to fasten the flower into his coat.

“They seem quite human to me, almost like

mother and daughter," she said, as she looked at the white rose with its attendant bud, nestling among the green leaves. His sudden change of countenance made her sure that he knew what mother and daughter she had in mind.

"Eloise," he began, "I suppose you have never thought that your friendship with Philip means disloyalty to Margaret, but if you knew how a man feels about such things —"

She stiffened perceptibly. "If she can't hold him, why should she care if he amuses himself with me? If I could n't have the whole of a man's devotion, I should not want any of it."

"But, Eloise, Margaret is so gentle and trusting. You can't help attracting, but you could let him alone."

"Richard, you have a high sense of honor, and if you don't look out, it will spoil four lives. I may not have any of the family honor, but I know what I want. To know what you want and get it if you can is the only way to have any comfort in this world. If, last year, you had gone to Margaret Ware and told her you loved her, there would never have been all this fuss and wretchedness."

Richard's face changed in spite of his effort not to betray himself.

"Deny it if you can; tell me you don't love her, that you have never given her a second thought."

"I am not in a position to give any girl a second thought," he said decisively.

"Well, all I can say is that your sense of honor drove her into engaging herself to a man she did not love."

"Eloise, you are crazy. She has loved Philip ever since she was eight years old."

"If that is true, it seems strange she should try to break her engagement. Philip told me to-night that she wants to do it."

It flashed upon Richard that his sister was trying to use him as a tool to accomplish Philip's freedom, and his anger flamed up.

"If she offers to set him free, it is because of you. No girl with a spark of spirit would like the way you've been letting him fool around with you."

"You are perfectly outrageous to me," she cried passionately, "and I have had enough to bear. Any other man would take his sister's part. Did I ask Philip to come to see me? Am I to be rude to him when he insists on coming? I hope I am a lady, even if I do have a brother who forgets that he is a gentleman."

"You think you are a lady?" said Richard, cuttingly. "You'll never succeed for long in disguising yourself in the part."

"You had better be careful what you say to me, for if I am not a lady, I have all the more need of your protection and your consideration."

“You, you — exasperating torment,” he said between his teeth; “you always succeed in putting me in the wrong.”

“If you were n’t in the wrong, no amount of ingenuity on my side could put you there. I am glad I have n’t inherited the Baker temper,” and she looked across at her father, while her face softened as it always did when her eyes rested on him.

Andrew Howland was peacefully sleeping in his chair after a hard day’s work. His hands, like his daughter’s, were delicately fashioned, with long, slender fingers, and looked as if they were meant for gentler tasks than had been their portion; and his face, although it was sad, was marked by the serene lines which show that their possessor has had a life full of generous thoughts.

Richard was brought to himself by the sight of his father, and the fierce anger he had felt against his sister gave place to a consuming sense of shame and self-contempt. It was the first time he had so completely lost his self-control since his mother’s death, and he had believed that it would never happen again. This scene seemed to take him back to the days of his crude youth.

Now that Richard’s outburst was over Eloise’s mood suddenly changed and in a tone of bewildering sweetness, she said, “Poor old Richard, I know what made you so angry. I did not realize

how much you cared about her, or I would not have spoken as I did."

Richard put out his hand and gripped hers. "I am a perfect brute when I get going."

Eloise touched his shoulder caressingly.

"I like you, Richard," she said gently; "I like you even when you are rude, and she has liked you ever since we were at school together."

"Don't, Eloise," he said sharply, "I don't believe a word you say."

"Go to her and tell her that you love her. It can't do any harm for her to know it."

"Go to her?" Richard began to pace up and down the room. "Do you suppose I've sunk so low as to do a thing like that? Even if it were true that she has broken her engagement, do you suppose I would go to her when I'm saddled with a crop of my brother's debts, and have a family connection through him that would be an insult to offer any woman?"

"But, Richard, she has money enough for both of you, and you are getting all the best practice in Edgefield, and Lawrence is n't doing so badly, now he's landlord of the Edgefield House."

"A leopard can't change his spots; but it was n't so much Lawrence I was thinking of as Gus Leggett. She could n't forget that my brother's father-in-law is the man who killed her father."

"Every one says Gus will never be convicted of murder. Jerry McKnight says Dr. Ware

rushed into Gus's private room and provoked the assault. Dr. Ware was always very charming to me, but we all know he had a sarcastic way with him, and that he had been pursuing Gus with his tongue for years."

"Oh, what does it signify," said Richard, wearily. "Whatever extenuating circumstances there were, Dr. Ware's death came through him."

"When Gus is serving his sentence in prison, Margaret won't be constantly reminded of what has happened. You love her; she is the only girl you ever have loved or ever will love." She noticed that Richard grew white at these words and was encouraged to proceed. "And yet you can calmly see her engaged to a man she does not love, and you won't give her the chance to choose."

"No, I won't," said Richard, stubbornly. "I am sure she and Philip are fond of each other."

CHAPTER XXIX

PISGAH

AFTER Eloise went upstairs, Richard tried to quiet the tumult of feeling which her words aroused. He had thought once that Margaret's friendship would be enough to brighten his whole life, and then during those sad weeks of her father's illness, he found his old love for her coming back with fourfold power, so when there was no longer any need of him, he had felt that his only possible salvation lay in not seeing her again. He knew his sister's habit of stretching the truth to suit her own purposes, so he told himself over and over again that he was sure Margaret loved her cousin, and that there had been some temporary estrangement. Richard knew it was cowardly to keep away, if his presence could give her any comfort. It was not until Eloise was on board an ocean steamer, however, that he went to make his long-deferred call on the Wares, only to find that they were both at Nahant with Madam Lancaster, whose death was but a question of days.

Two weeks later Delia went down to the funeral and came back with Margaret and her aunt

Nancy. Mrs. Bates was to stay with the girls until Mrs. Ware could return. To escape the intense heat they had gone to the little camp on Howland's Hill, where Margaret and her father had spent so many happy days.

The fact that Margaret was only a mile away from him was most disastrous to Richard's peace of mind. He felt that common politeness required him to call on Mrs. Bates and his cousin Delia, but the longer he put it off, the harder it was to go.

At last a letter reached him from Eloise, who had mailed it at Liverpool. It enclosed one for Margaret, and she asked if he would not take it to her himself.

"I should like you to find out whether Peggy's engagement is broken or not," she said, "for Philip has written to Aunt Sophia to say he is thinking of coming abroad with a friend this summer, and he hopes to have time to look us up. If he is engaged to Margaret, I feel it would be much better for me to discourage his coming; so you see, Richard, that I, too, have some glimmerings of the family honor."

Richard gave a short laugh. His determination not to help Eloise still held. He longed to tear up the letter, but as this course was impossible, he decided to mail it. He got so far as to redirect the envelope and put on a stamp, but it seemed too discourteous to send it by mail. He gave

another short laugh as he put the letter in his pocket, and started to climb the hill.

How well Eloise understood him! She was an artist in the way she played on the foibles of human nature. He did not like being forced to do her bidding! After all, he need not take the letter to Margaret. If he slipped it into the rural delivery box at the turn of the road, she would get it almost as soon.

When he came in sight of this point, he saw Delia taking the letters out of the box, and he knew he had only to hand Eloise's to her and turn back. His disappointment was so keen that he felt as if he could not bear it.

The cousins gave each other a matter-of-fact greeting.

"I have a letter Eloise sent Margaret," he said, taking it out of his pocket. "Will you give it to her?"

Delia, in a brown linen dress with smoothly arranged hair and a sunburned face, was the embodiment of crisp, good sense.

"Are n't you coming back with me to the camp?" she asked. "I'm so glad to see you. I should have written to ask you to come, only I've been expecting every day that you'd drop in. Margaret has seemed so used up and so unlike herself. She has been sleeping badly, and I thought perhaps you would give her bromide, or something quieting."

"I hope — I thought she 'd be better in this high air."

"Cousin Nancy and I hoped so too, but she is worse; Philip has been pestering her again. He saw her at the time of the funeral. The fact that she has broken her engagement does n't seem to make the least difference to him."

"Then it's true that her engagement is broken?" Richard inquired with affected indifference.

"Yes, but I suppose he thinks that as he teased her into being engaged to him in the first place, he can do it again, and I am afraid that he can. He has been talking to Margaret's mother, and getting her to say that she would be glad to have them married at once, and Cousin Nancy has been begging her to give Philip another chance. If she were to give him ten more chances, it would n't make any difference."

"I don't agree with you. I believe that Philip would be steady enough if they were once married. Are you sure it's not just a lover's quarrel?" Richard asked with elaborate carelessness.

"I am sure of nothing except that Margaret is getting tired out. You'll come back with me, won't you, to see her and Cousin Nancy?"

"No, as long as you can take her the letter I won't come. Jack Murray is out of town for a few days, and I promised him that I would go to see old Mrs. Upham."

When Delia reached the camp, she found her cousin sitting out on the piazza with her portfolio in her lap. Margaret was writing to Philip. She was very unhappy, and her duty that she saw so clearly when she gave him up did not seem so certain now. She wished she had an object in life like Delia, for in that case she would never have grown so dependent on human sympathy and love. At first it had been so blessed to be free, and to feel it was no longer wrong to think of Richard. It was evident, however, that what Eloise had told Philip was untrue; for if Richard had loved her, he would have come to her as soon as he heard of the broken engagement, and pride bade her forget him as quickly as possible. It was Philip who loved her and needed her, and who had looked so wretchedly unhappy when she had seen him in Boston, that she could not but ask herself whether, having once been engaged to him, she was not still bound to him by the spirit of the law.

“My dear Philip,” she began, and paused. If she told him that he might come to see her, there would be no going back another time. “I can’t let you come,” she wrote. “How I wish I were a little girl again, and then we could be so happy together! But I can never love you well enough to marry you, and I ought to have known it in the beginning.”

Then a shadow crossed her page, and, looking up, she saw Delia.

"I have brought you some letters," she said, handing her one from Philip, which Margaret looked at indifferently. "Here is another," and Delia gave her the letter that had been redirected by Richard.

As Margaret took it the color rushed into her face. "It did n't come through the mail," she said.

"No. I met Richard, and he gave it to me. It is from Eloise."

Margaret longed to escape and be alone. The tumult that had been called up in her mind by the sight of Richard's handwriting was lost on Delia, who stood by impatiently waiting for her cousin to read her foreign letter.

"Does Eloise say anything about father and mother?" Delia asked finally.

Margaret looked up with compunction. "You poor dear, have you been waiting all this time for that?" Delia's world seemed enviably tranquil and happy, filled with strong family affections and useful work.

"She says they are well and having such a good time. She says," and Margaret read aloud: "'Uncle Gideon looks ten years younger and seems as gay and happy as a boy. Aunt Sophia has not been able to do any mountain climbing, and the other day, when he and I were going up the Faulhorn, he was so gallant and debonair that some one thought we were on our wedding

journey!" Margaret hurried through her letter feeling sure that this item was not the reason for its construction. Almost at the end, sandwiched between the description of a fascinating Russian, and of the sunrise on Mont Blanc, were these words: "I have had one or two such amusing notes from Philip. How he does hit off people and things! I should think getting his letters would almost reconcile you to his plan of going abroad this summer. I imagine, however, that you will take pity on the poor boy, and that he will not come alone."

"What is the matter?" Delia asked. "Is Eloise particularly aggravating?"

"Not any more so than usual. She was born particularly aggravating. I knew Philip had been planning to join them abroad," Margaret said, as she folded up her letter; "he told me so when he saw me in Boston, but he wanted to give it up and come here instead. It does n't seem to make much difference to him which of us he has to play with."

"My dear child, Philip is only an irresponsible boy. What he needs is to get away from both of you, and have a summer among men, hunting and fishing in the Maine woods, and I am going to tell him so the first chance I get. When I am in Paris with Eloise next winter, I will look out that he does n't get entangled with her. She is great fun, and I'm very fond of her, but she

is n't the right one for Philip. What that boy needs is a sister who will tell him a few home truths that his mother has not the courage to mention, and I will be willing to undertake the job. I 'll keep him busy, and you shall have him back heart whole, whenever you want him."

"Thank you, Delia."

Margaret felt an imperative need to be alone. She looked at the view that she had first seen at sunrise so many years ago, and once more it became full of poetic, mysterious charm. She had a longing to see the place again where she had stood with Richard, and, declining Delia's offer of companionship, she went down the rocky footpath.

She had reached the dear spot now. The fir-balsam had grown into a tall tree and she drew one of the branches down and inhaled its fragrance. She felt there was no other place in the whole world that could ever hold for her such a sense of peace and calm. Then she turned and looked across the valley. The trees had grown so that the houses in the village were blotted out. Only the spire of the church rose above them as if, in the gradual submersion of all things earthly, it pointed the way to heaven. She thought with inexpressible tenderness of her father, as she always did when she was much moved, and she knew that it was this great sorrow that had first given her a knowledge of her own heart.

“Dear father,” she said very softly. She could no more lose her father than she could lose her identity. And Richard? She could not lose him. Life might part them, his work might come between them and absorb him so that he did not feel the need of a woman’s love, but the spell of that early morning had been thrown around them, and both of them had been changed because of the inspiration that they had gathered at a common source. As she sat there watching the afternoon shadows grow longer and longer in the valley, she felt that although life might be lonely for her, it would always be full of absorbing interest. She was glad Richard was a worker and a fighter. A great peace filled her heart. It did not matter whether Richard loved her; all that really mattered was that he and she were in this beautiful world. She knew there had come into her life a gift that, whether it meant joy or sorrow, hereafter set her apart from those who snatch what superficial happiness they can in order that they may evade pain. She, too, was to be one of those whose lives are real.

She heard the crackling of underbrush and made ready to escape. It was Richard who had been to see his patient, and had taken this *détour* on his way down the hill, as he often did in the late afternoon.

His eyes had been arrested by a patch of white, but before he had time to resent the discovery

of his Mount of Vision he recognized Margaret. She stood there poised for flight.

"Richard, I did n't expect to see you," she said nervously. "I came here to be alone — and think things out." She hurriedly gathered up her letters as she spoke.

"I will go." He turned and she realized that in another moment he would be gone, past recall. As she saw him walking away from her through the underbrush, she had the despairing feeling that it would cost him nothing to walk out of her life forever. It was cruel and she could not bear it. "Richard," she called to him, "please come back!"

He turned, and as he saw her standing where they had stood together so many years ago, he was overmastered by a force stronger than himself.

"If any one goes, it is I who should," she said; "you belong here, and I do not."

"You have belonged here for the last seven years."

By a common impulse they turned and looked across the valley.

"I have called this place Pisgah," he said very low.

"Pisgah? Is n't that a Bible name?"

"Yes, it is the mountain Moses climbed to get a glimpse of the Promised Land."

"Where is the Promised Land?"

"It is over there in the east. Many and many a time I have come here for a glimpse of it; you can't see it now, for the trees have grown so much that they hide your chimney tops."

Something in his voice made her wonder if it could be possible that he had loved her all these years. She felt a rush of emotion that overcame her, and forbade speech.

He mistook the change he saw in her face for pity. "It is good of you to be sorry for me, but never mind me; I'm bound to have the sort of life I like. I won't let even the loss of you spoil it. Of course you've always known how I've felt about you," he said with emotion. "You've made my life; everything that is good in me has come through you. I am afraid that letter upset you, but if you will only let Philip see that you love him, Eloise will not have the least shadow of influence with him."

"But, Richard —" she began unsteadily.

"I want you to be happy. I want it more than I want anything else, and I know how you and Philip have cared for each other ever since you were children."

"I thought I loved him," she said tremulously, "and then I found that it was — that it was n't Philip I had loved best ever since I was a child."

"Margaret!"

Richard did not remember now the barriers that divided them; in the light of his great discovery these were swept away; for here under the blue sky and with the forest trees around them, they were brought face to face with the realities, and once again, as in that early morning at sunrise, it was God's world and not man's.

CHAPTER XXX

FOR EDMUND

It was early December, but Alice had not as yet taken possession of her grandmother's house. She found a certain mournful satisfaction in living on in the spot that had been so dear to Edmund. Her step-sister was making her a brief visit, and Alice had gone upstairs to be alone.

Nancy was sitting in the library. Everything there was left just as it was when Edmund was living; his Morris chair stood where it used to stand, and his desk was open and littered over with his papers. The only change was that his picture in a silver frame stood on the mantel-piece, and before it was a bowl of roses. They were to Nancy a symbol of the imperishability of human affection. She could see those flowers, continually renewed by Alice, through a long vista of years, never fading, never once forgotten, but put there as faithfully as the vestal virgin tends the flame. She wished that her cousin might have had more of the laughter and gayety he loved, during his lifetime, and that Alice had been as interested in his work as Margaret was in Richard's, but she hastily checked the thought, for Alice had loved Edmund with the intensity of a strong nature. As for herself, she had hardly

been given the right to mourn. Alice had had everything. Edmund had been her devoted husband for almost thirty years, and she still owned those priceless recollections, while she could come every day into this quiet room full of his books and papers; and she, Nancy, had only the memory of a friendship that had often failed her, as to its visible signs. But she felt as if she were richer, with these memories and with the few relics her aunt had given her than Alice was: for when a life has been lived, it is its influence on other lives that counts, and Nancy knew that for her the world would always be full of charm because Edmund had lived in it. She could still find happiness in comforting his mother, watching over the interests of his daughter, and devoting herself to his wife. Then the door opened and Alice came in, a tragic figure in her black gown, with her face set to a look of endurance.

A peal of laughter reached them from the other room where Richard was sitting with Margaret.

"How can she laugh like that?" Alice asked with a little shiver.

"Dear Margaret! I am glad she can."

Nancy had been sore at heart because Margaret had refused to marry her boy, but she had grown to feel that Richard would make her happier than Philip could have done, and it had been easier to forgive her because he had seemed so like his old self after his summer in the Maine woods.

“When I look at Margaret and Richard,” Alice said, “I always feel that some day it must end for them like this. One of them must be left to face the misery of a lonely life.”

The light came into Nancy’s eyes. “Not a lonely life, Alice, never a lonely life while memory is left. Alice, I am going to tell you something Edmund said to me long ago. I think I can repeat his very words, I have said them to myself so many times. He told me that when you came into his life, he knew what love meant. That it was a force all gracious, all beneficent; that there was no such thing as age, for age could not matter since you grew old together, and that even death had lost its terror since his love was so strong it made him feel sure of passing through the gateway to eternal life. Alice, when a woman is loved like this, it is such a deep and wonderful experience that it ought not to matter whether the two are living together in this world, or whether one is waiting for the other for a little while.”

Alice turned her face sharply away. “When did he say that?” she asked huskily.

“When you were first married. The afternoon you came to see me when — when Joe was there.”

Alice had never been able to speak of Edmund, and now she felt shaken and wrenched as if a hurricane had passed.

So this was how he had felt about her! He

had never told her this! Almost from the first her reserve had put up a barrier between them; it was his unselfish, sympathetic cousin who had opened the flood-gates of his heart. He had felt like this about her once! He, too, had seen the clear vision that had come to her in those early days of their married life. And having seen it, they had allowed the petty cares to creep in and the worldly interests to divide them, until time had dulled the edge of their happiness. Alice, who had never given way before her step-sister, leaned her head upon her hands, while the slow tears fell.

“My God!” she cried, “if it could only be given to us to live our lives over!”

Nancy came and put her arms about Alice. “There is a great deal of life left, dear,” she said.

“It is over for me. Oh, Nancy, what a grim jest life is! I wanted to live in that beautiful old house on Beacon Hill, and now it is mine and my husband is dead, and my daughter’s heart is given to a stranger.”

“A stranger? How can you say that, Alice dear! It seems to me as if Richard were as considerate of you as if he were already your son; and he is so thoughtful about wanting you to keep Margaret with you for the present.”

“But some time she will go, and I shall be left alone.”

Nancy took Alice’s strong hand between her

slender ones. "There is one thing more I want to tell you, dear. You remember the day I was with Edmund and you waited outside the door?"

Alice bent her head.

"I have always wanted you to know what he told me then. He said, 'I am sorry for Alice, poor girl, for she cares for so few people. Nancy, if I go, will you promise to love her for yourself and for me too? Will you promise to do all you can for her?' And I promised. He said something about Margaret's being so happy she would grieve only for a little time, and when I told him how I cared, he gave his whimsical little laugh and said, 'Nancy, I have never worried about you. If you were sentenced to work in a coal mine, you would get interested in all your fellow-workers and find the gray light very restful to your eyes.'"

So this was what he and Nancy had said to each other, Alice thought remorsefully. Even then he had been planning for his wife's comfort, while she, in a passion of rebellion, had walked up and down outside the closed door!

"Oh, Alice," Nancy begged, "let me come and live with you when Margaret goes. I have always loved you so. Do not send me away. If you can't love me for my own sake, love me for his. There is no one who needs me now. Aunt Margaret is so frail that Marcia does not want me

for long at a time, and Philip, poor boy, does n't want me to join him abroad, and I feel perfectly easy not to be with him, while Sophia and Delia are in Paris. Alice, do let me come. I should be so glad, so proud, if I could make you, not happy, but less sad."

Suddenly the ice of Alice's long reserve melted. She took Nancy's trembling little hand in hers. Alice had always dreamed of unqualified devotion, and one prop after another had failed her. She had hoped to find this rest for her heart in her husband's love, but he had had so many interests that an underlying sense of jealousy had spoiled her happiness; and when her child came, she had sought to find this absolute devotion from her; but she was like her father, and first the world and then a great love kept them apart; and now her life was ending as it might have begun, and her gentle step-sister, who had adored her in those early days, was offering her the unqualified devotion of her heart.

Nancy, on her side, had a nature that asked nothing but to serve and to love, and the more props that were taken from her, the more her heart turned to those that were left.

Alice looked at her in wonder. What Edmund had said of her was true. "You have lost your husband and a child, and your son has gone away from you," she said, "and yet you seem still to find satisfaction in living."

“Life seems to me like this,” said Nancy, “a place full of joy and sadness, and our joy is never quite complete because we know that others are in sorrow, and our sorrow is never overwhelming because we know that others are happy.”

Once more there came the sound of laughter from the other room, and Richard pushed open the door to let Margaret pass through into the library. The light of a new happiness was in his face, and Margaret had never looked more beautiful or more radiantly content. They stood for a moment hand in hand like two children who have had a happy hour of play.

Alice felt a pang of envy as she looked at them.

“This is the tale of the generations,” thought Nancy. “We live and love, and after a time we seem to others to grow old, but there is no growing old for ourselves while there are the younger ones to help and to love.”

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